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Nick Carter Stories

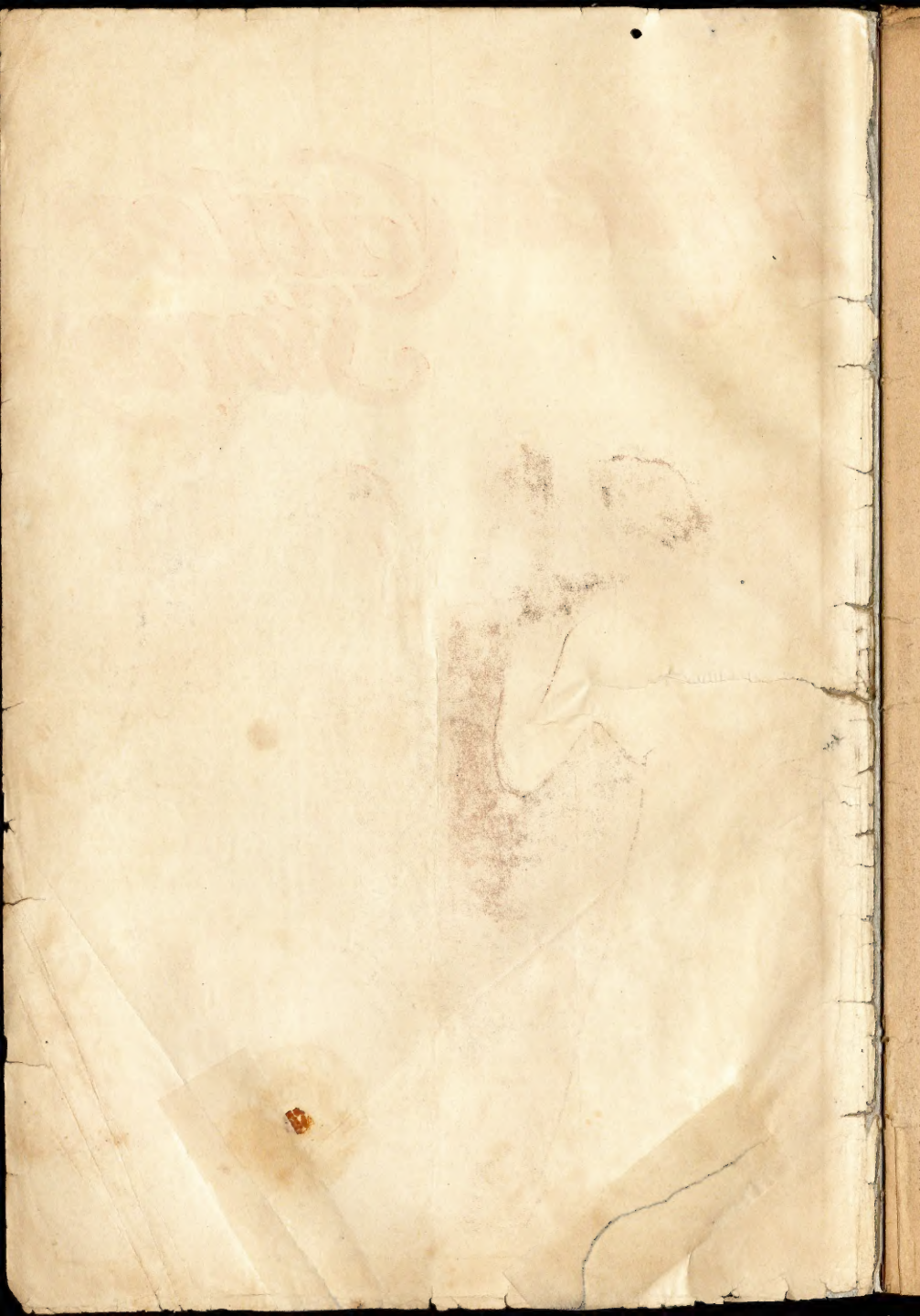
ISABEL BENTON'S
TRUMP CARD

OR

A DESPERATE PLAY TO WIN



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NICK CARTER STORIES

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No. 71.

NEW YORK, January 17, 1914.

Price Five Cents.

ISABEL BENTON'S TRUMP CARD;

Or, A DESPERATE PLAY TO WIN.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

MURDERED AT HIS OWN DOORSTEP.

Nick Carter was seated in the study in his house, in Madison Avenue, in New York, when Patsy Garvan, the great detective's second assistant, unceremoniously entered the room. He held in his hand a copy of an extra afternoon paper, just out, and this he extended toward the detective.

"Something you would like to see at once," he said. "There has been another murder at Linden Fells."

"What!" exclaimed Nick.

The first page of the paper contained the usual display headlines, but, as usual, very little information of importance followed the announcement, but what little there was contained the information that Reginald Danton had been found that morning, dead, upon the veranda of his father's country seat on the Hudson—Linden Fells, it was called.

According to the account in the paper, nothing whatever was known concerning the tragedy save that the young man had been discovered by the servant whose duty it was to open the house for the day.

The statement made by the servant amounted, in substance, to this:

It was her duty to open the front doors of the house, to sweep off the veranda, dust the chairs, et cetera, et cetera, and she had proceeded as usual with her occupation on the morning in question.

It was not an unusual thing for her to find her young master asleep in one of the great chairs on such occasions. His habits had long been rather irregular, and during the summer, when the nights were warm, if he came home on the last train, which arrived at the station shortly after one o'clock in the morning, he often seated himself in a particularly large and comfortable chair, which occupied a secluded corner of the piazza, and which

was concealed from view by thick vines which trailed upon a lattice, and which grew very thick and luxuriantly over that portion of the building.

The servant had found him there so many times that it was not her custom to disturb him, for the reason that he was usually awakened by the noises she made in the performance of her work, and, invariably, she pretended not to see him at all.

She told the reporter that this was the only time when her presence and the noises she made had not awakened him, but on this occasion, perceiving that he still slept, or seemed to do so, she purposely made more than the usual commotion, and finally actually knocked over a chair so that it made a great clattering noise as it fell, but, notwithstanding this fact, her young master continued undisturbed.

She could only see that he was in the chair, for the back of it was toward her, but she could see his arms hanging at either side, and also his feet, as she looked beneath the chair.

When, however, her work was done, and he had made no move to awaken, she decided that it was her duty to arouse him, and, accordingly, she approached closely behind him and called:

"Mr. Reginald! Mr. Reginald!"

He did not reply to her, and, after calling in that manner several times, she stepped around in front of the chair, determined to awaken him.

One glance was, however, sufficient to assure her why he had paid no attention to the noises she had made.

Reginald Danton was dead.

More than that, he had been murdered. He had been stabbed to death while he was sleeping in that chair, if appearances could explain the situation, for the handle of a dagger protruded from the broad expanse of his shirt front, where it had been left by the assassin after the fatal blow was struck.

Now, it appeared that this servant was rather unusual in her methods, and on this occasion she displayed remarkable nerve and forethought.

Instead of screaming and fainting, after the manner of many women on such occasions, she looked around her hastily after the first startled cry that she had uttered upon making the discovery, and, satisfied that she had attracted no attention, she hastened back to the middle of the piazza, out of reach of the chair in which the dead body of her young master was seated, and there she compelled herself to calmness, while she thought over the situation.

This was to the effect that the authorities must be summoned, and that the body could not be disturbed until somebody in authority arrived on the scene.

Miss Mercedes Danton, her young mistress, was still suffering from the effects of the shock and the burns she had sustained in Chicago, where she had been saved from a burning house by Nick Carter, just in time to escape being burned to death.*

Since that time, now approaching a month, she had kept almost entirely to her own rooms, only leaving them, during the dusk of the evening, to wander among the shrubbery in the spacious grounds.

The burns she had sustained, while not especially severe, had so badly singed her hair that it had to be cut off, and her face itself had suffered such a scorching that, in order to preserve it from any possible unpleasant consequences, she kept it swathed in soft cloths most of the time, and had not yet suffered herself to be seen save in the dimmest of lights.

Therefore, this servant felt that it was unwise for her to disturb her young mistress with the awful intelligence of her brother's shocking death.

Reginald Danton's father was an old man, and an excitable one. His entire life was passed among the bulls and bears of the Stock Exchange. At the present time he had been confined to the house for almost a week with an indisposition which the doctors found it difficult to define; but he was far from well, and correspondingly irritable. Therefore, the servant thought it would also be unwise to disturb him.

The mother was out of the question. Reginald was her favorite child. The sudden shock of his death—and of such a death—might kill her. Plainly, it would be unwise to call her.

The hour was still very early in the morning, for it was only just past five o'clock, and, inasmuch as fully three hours would elapse before any member of the family would be astir, and as it was extremely unlikely that any person other than herself would visit the veranda before that time, the serving woman decided that she would notify the authorities herself, and thus accomplish all the unpleasantness of her task in one coup, leaving it for others to break the news to the members of the family.

There was a telephone in the library, and the servant made use of that.

She called up the family physician, Doctor Pollock; not the doctor, however, who was attending Miss Mercedes, for he was a specialist, who came out every day from the city; but Doctor Pollock, who was attending the father and mother of the murdered young man.

In a very few words, she acquainted Doctor Pollock with the particulars of her discovery, and was greatly gratified

to hear him commend her over the phone for her thoughtfulness. He also assured her that he would lose no time in arriving on the scene, and that he would bring the coroner with him.

It was not yet six o'clock when the doctor, accompanied by the coroner, arrived at Linden Fells, and Jane Belden was waiting for them on the steps at the front door when Doctor Pollock's motor car swung up the drive.

The servant pointed silently toward the chair at the far end of the veranda, behind the screen of thickly growing vines, and then she seated herself on the steps and buried her face in her hands and wept.

She had stood the strain of her discovery and the time of waiting for the doctor to arrive wonderfully well, but when at last her responsibility was ended, she became an ordinary woman again, and wept.

But Doctor Pollock and the coroner paid no heed whatever to her weeping.

They were already beside the chair wherein the dead body of the young man was seated.

And here the account of the affair ended, so far as the newspaper was concerned. It was evident that the forms had been kept open till the last minute to obtain all that could be had for that edition, and so, with an announcement that full details of the murder would be printed in a later edition, the account closed.

Nick Carter put the paper aside, and, leaning back in his chair, blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

He made no comment whatever upon what he had read, but that he was greatly disturbed, and also deeply interested, was palpably evident.

Presently, when Patsy turned to leave the room, the detective stopped him.

"Patsy," he said, "there is something wrong at Linden Fells—something more than this murder, I mean. I have felt it ever since I returned from Chicago. Let's go out there, Patsy, without waiting to be asked. Come, that's a good idea. We'll do it!"

CHAPTER II.

A BLOW FROM BEHIND THE CHAIR.

It so happened that Doctor Pollock also wished to have Nick Carter on the scene.

The moment he knew that a murder had been committed, his first thought was of Nick Carter, whose acquaintance he had made upon an occasion somewhat similar to this one, and at the same house.*

Since that time they had not met, but the doctor had many pleasant recollections of the detective, and, moreover, he had a profound respect for Nick Carter's wonderful abilities.

A strange circumstance connected with his thoughts of Nick Carter at that time was that he had been considering the wisdom of consulting the great detective for some time past.

Not that there was anything especially wrong at Linden Fells, or that he could, if asked to do so, supply any really good reason for his wish to consult the detective; but ever since the return of Mercedes Danton from Chicago,** where she had sustained those injuries to which

*See No. 70 of the NICK CARTER STORIES.

*See No. 60 of the NICK CARTER STORIES: "The Murder at Linden Fells."

**See No. 70 of the NICK CARTER STORIES: "A Queen of Her Kind."

reference has already been made, the doctor had felt that all was not as it should be.

He had hesitated to say anything to the detective, however, lest his misgivings should be attributed to jealousy—professional jealousy, because he had not once been consulted in regard to those same injuries.

A specialist had been called in at once after Mercedes' return, and Doctor Pollock had not seen the young woman at all, since her arrival, save at a distance, and in half darkness.

But it was not professional jealousy, or, in fact, jealousy of any kind, which had disturbed the doctor. In fact, he could not have told what it was that disturbed him; he could only have said that he was disturbed by he knew not what, and he had felt more than once that the detective, Nick Carter, was the only person who could be depended upon to listen to such a statement without sneering.

The illness of the old gentleman puzzled him. There seemed to be nothing whatever the matter with him, and yet he was unmistakably ill.

The doctor had mentioned having a consultation, but Mr. Danton had pooh-poohed the idea, and had told him flatly that when he found himself unable to treat a whimsical old man, it was time for him to resign his post and give another physician a chance.

Then, there was Mrs. Danton. She was ailing, too, and she had grown steadily weaker—also without a definite or defined reason.

Doctor Pollock was an excellent physician, a master of his profession, but he had to confess himself puzzled by the conditions which surrounded him at Linden Fells—the more, because those very conditions did not warrant him in calling in other physicians in consultation.

When, therefore, he was told over the telephone that young Reginald Danton had been murdered on his own doorstep, he was amazed at himself that he was not more greatly surprised than he was. It was the first moment when he admitted to himself that he had, without knowing it, been expecting a calamity of some kind to happen.

As soon as Jane Belden finished her communication over the telephone, he called up the coroner and told him of the murder, saying that he was about starting for the Fells in his automobile, and that he would stop for the coroner on the way, and immediately thereafter he sought to get the detective over the phone.

But it happened that the phone was in one of its throes of nonservice.

He tried and tried again, but for some inexplicable reason he could not get Nick Carter, and as time was passing, he finally gave it up, sought the coroner, and they went out to the Fells together.

There, as we know, he again had no opportunity to telephone to the detective.

The very nature of the case made it necessary that he and the coroner should perform their work swiftly and remove the body into the house as soon as possible. And so it happened that it was really many hours after his first knowledge of the crime before he had an opportunity of telephoning to Nick Carter, and that when he finally did so, he was told that the detective had gone out, and doubtless would not return before the following day—in other words, the telephone call reached the house of the detective almost an hour after Patsy took the "extra" into the study, and at that time Nick and Patsy had both gone out.

When the detective, accompanied by his young assistant, Patsy, boarded the train at the Grand Central Station, they were both effectually disguised, for Nick had his own good reasons for desiring to appear on the ground incognito—that is, unknown to the members and servants of the household.

There had been a strong friendship between the detective and Reginald Danton, and so it was that Nick Carter felt a personal interest in the case.

When the detective left the train he repaired at once to the house of Doctor Pollock, and fortunately found him in, and naturally overjoyed that the detective had come to him of his own volition without awaiting the delayed message that he had sought so vainly to send.

"Let us begin right, doctor," said the detective. "I have my own reasons for not wishing it to appear that Nick Carter is engaged upon this case at all. It is more than likely that I will be sent for by some member of the family, but if I am sent for, I have arranged to have it announced that I am out of town. Do you understand me?"

"I think so."

"I will make my statement even more emphatic."

"As emphatic as you please."

"Very well, then; this: I do not, under any circumstances, wish any other person than ourselves to know that I am here, or that I am even available. If Mercedes should learn of—"

"Mercedes, least of all, I should say," interrupted the doctor.

"Why?"

"I don't know why, only that Mercedes has not been at all like herself since her return from Chicago, where you saved her from the fire. Have you seen her since then, Mr. Carter?"

"No."

"Nor have I. She sent for a specialist at once, and has not even consulted me about her injuries. This is an unusual proceeding."

"I hope, doctor, that you are not professionally jealous," said Nick, with a smile.

"I am professionally as well as personally disturbed. I tell you, Mr. Carter, there is something wrong here somewhere, as sure as you are a foot high."

"I should say that there is considerable that is wrong. But to continue."

"Certainly. Pardon me. Go ahead."

"Did you ever happen to hear of Joshua Juniper?"

"Often. He is a downtown detective, is he not?"

"Yes; and he is also Nick Carter, although few people are aware of it."

"I see."

"I want you to take me around to the coroner and introduce me to him as Mr. Juniper. You can say that you took it upon yourself to send for Nick Carter, but discovered that he was out of the city. That then, you communicated with the chief of the detective bureau in Manhattan, whom you asked to recommend to you the best private detective he knew of, and you were told to send for Juniper. After that, leave the rest to me."

"All right; come ahead. Jove, but I'm glad that you are here!"

"One moment, doctor. I want to ask you a few questions about the murder."

"Very well."

"How did you first hear about it?"

"Over the telephone, from Jane Belden, one of the maids at Linden Fells."

"Surprising forethought on her part, was it not?"

"Unusual, perhaps. Hardly surprising, under the circumstances."

"Why so?"

"For the reason that there was really nobody in the house whom she could summon to her aid without bringing down another calamity; at least, it amounted to about that situation when she discovered the body of Reginald Danton."

"How so?"

"Mercedes has kept to her room and in the dark most of the time since her return from Chicago. She could have done nothing if told of the murder. Mr. Danton is ill; Mrs. Danton is ill, and——"

"Very well; the maid telephoned for you. Did she leave the body entirely undisturbed until you arrived on the scene?"

"She assured me that she had not touched it at all. In fact, she said that after telephoning she returned to the piazza steps and waited there until we arrived. She did not change her position until we got there."

"Very good; you arrived in company with the coroner, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me what you did then."

"It was half past five—a little more—when I got there. Reginald had been dead several hours."

"How many? At what time should you say the blow was struck?"

"As early as two o'clock in the morning."

"Three hours and a half, eh?"

"Yes."

"I wish I might have been there with you, but I was not, and so will have to trust to your eyes and senses for what can be discovered from that moment. He was in the big chair at the end of the piazza, was he not, doctor?"

"Yes, the one that is screened by the vines. He was in the habit of dropping asleep in that chair, warm nights, when he arrived home with too much wine aboard, but——"

"Go on; but what?"

"The chair was not in the position it usually occupied. I noticed that at once. I could almost swear that the chair has never occupied but one position since I have been familiar with the premises."

"And that was——"

"It always faced to the west."

"I see, and this morning——"

"It was facing north."

"Perhaps Reginald turned it that way before he dropped into it."

"If he did, it was the only time within the recollection of Jane Belden that he has ever done so. She has found him sleeping there often, but he had never taken the trouble to move the chair before going to sleep, until last night."

"Well, that tells us very little, only that the assassin, after striking the blow, wheeled the chair around so that discovery would be delayed as long as possible. Now, what more?"

"Whoever struck the blow, did so from over the victim's shoulder. The blow was downward, and, from the position of the weapon, must have been struck from behind."

"What was the weapon?"

"A long, thin-bladed, two-edged dagger. Reginald was stabbed directly through the heart."

"So that he must have died instantly."

"I do not think he could have moved after he was struck—more than to shudder."

"Had the body been robbed?"

"I do not think it had been touched at all. I was particularly impressed with that belief when I viewed it. I should say that the assassin approached from behind, leaned over the chair, struck the blow, turned the chair about, and then calmly walked away."

"Where to?"

"Ah! That is the question."

"You have already said that the maid waited on the steps until you arrived. That means, I suppose, that she did not go off the steps."

"Certainly."

"The walks around the house are of gravel——"

"I know what you would suggest, Mr. Carter. I may as well tell you at once that it did not occur to me to look at the walks, and I doubt if I would have discovered anything if I had done so."

"Why?"

"Because it would require the eyes of an expert like yourself to determine anything from such an examination. I am not an expert."

"True. Had you no other reason for making that remark in just that tone of voice?"

"No; that is, no good reason."

"You are ambiguous."

"Well, I have not forgotten that the other murder that occurred in that house was committed from the inside of it; and Jane Belden tells me that she found the front door ajar, when she came down to her work this morning."

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S HAND.

"That might be accounted for by supposing that Reginald opened the door with his key before he decided to take a nap in the chair," said Nick.

"It might," replied the doctor.

"If the assassin came out of the house to commit the deed, and then returned to the house, he would scarcely have left the door open behind him to show the direction of his flight," suggested Nick.

"Not unless he would wish to convey the very impression you have named," replied the doctor.

"Good!" exclaimed Nick. "You would not make such a bad detective, after all, doctor, if you had half a chance to study the art."

"Look here, Mr. Carter, I don't make any pretense to detective abilities, but I have felt for almost a month that there is something wrong inside that house. I was not even surprised when Jane Belden told me of the murder over the phone this morning."

"Do you mean that you were expecting a murder?"

"Certainly not. I mean that I was in a condition of mind regarding that house where I would not have been surprised if it had been blown up with dynamite. That sounds like a rather wild statement, but I give you my word it expresses my feeling in the case."

"Humph!" said Nick. "You are expressive if not

lucid. Now let us return to the crime itself. What else did you discover?"

"Nothing else."

"Nothing?"

"Absolutely not a thing. Shall I give you an epitome of all that occurred from the instant I received the telephone message?"

"Yes."

"Very well: I received the message from Jane Belden. I asked her over the phone if she had touched the body or disturbed it at all. She said she had not and would not.

"I told her not to go near it again until we got there. She said she would not. I ordered her to permit nobody else to touch it, and she assured me that there was not the least likelihood that another person would approach that part of the house for at least three hours yet.

"Then I called up the coroner and told him about it. I told him that I would start at once in my automobile, and that I would stop for him. I did so. Then I tried to get you over the phone, but for some reason I could not get the connection. I resolved to try later.

"Then I went after the coroner and we went together to the Fells. The big gates were not opened yet, and I left my machine out in the road. The coroner and I ascended the path together. We discovered Jane Belden standing at the steps, leaning against the frame of the porte-cochère. She looked terribly frightened and began to weep as we approached.

"The coroner and I approached the body together. The back of the chair was toward us; the body faced away from us. It had settled down somewhat, but not really more than it might have done had Reginald been alive and sleeping instead of dead—murdered.

"I felt the forehead and pulse. The body was already chilled.

"We both pronounced Reginald dead, and agreed that he had been dead about three hours and a half—perhaps four hours.

"We examined the locality around the chair and on the piazza with great care. There was not a sign of a disturbance of any kind.

"Reginald's jewelry, and a wad of money, in his vest pocket, were undisturbed. We questioned the maid, but discovered nothing which you have not already been told."

"Was there a considerable flow of blood?"

"Very little. The dagger had been struck home so hard, and had been left without moving it, where it fell, that there was very little chance for blood to flow. There would naturally be internal bleeding, but the clothing was scarcely soiled at all."

"What did you do next?"

"Satisfied that we could discover nothing and accomplish nothing by leaving it where it was, we carried it, chair and all, to Reginald's room."

"And then—"

"I begged the coroner to leave it as it was until I could send for you. He consented, but when I telephoned and found that you could not be communicated with to-day—at least, that was the reply I received—it was decided to permit the undertakers to perform their work, so when you see the body you will find it prepared for burial."

"Well, that can't be helped now. What did you do next, doctor?"

"I took it upon myself to break the news to the members of the family."

"Good! Whom did you seek first?"

"Mercedes."

"Tell me about it, doctor."

"I thought she was the best one to inform first. I wished her to break it to her mother and father."

"Naturally. Go on."

"It was still too early for her to rise for the day, but I sent for her maid."

"Sarah Kearney?"

"No. Sarah Kearney has left her employ."

"Indeed! Well, you sent for the maid, and through her you sent word to Mercedes, I suppose?"

"Yes. I sent word that an accident had happened, and that it was important that I communicate with her in person at once. I begged her to permit me an interview with her."

"Well?"

"She returned word that she could not see me; that it was impossible."

"What did you do then?"

"I wrote a note in which I told her that her brother had been severely wounded and that I despaired of his life, that the news of the accident must be broken to her father and mother, and I thought she was the most fitting person to perform that service. I added at the bottom of the note that her brother might not live twenty minutes."

"And, of course, she came then, at once."

"She did nothing of the sort. Her maid returned in a great fright and demanded to know what I had done. She said that her mistress had read my note and straightway had fallen in a faint to the floor.

"I started to go to her, but the maid barred the way and would not permit me to enter the room. The sum of it all is that I have not seen Mercedes at all."

"It is not like Mercedes, is it, to act that way?"

"Not at all. One would think that the fire in Chicago deranged all her mental faculties, for it is certain that she has not been the same since her return from there. Before she left home to take that trip she was exceedingly gracious to me."

"And now—"

"Now, I find myself utterly ignored."

"What did you do next?"

"I went directly to Mr. Danton himself. I told him all about it. I thought it would kill him, but he received the news in a strangely apathetic way, almost as if the shock was so great that he did not realize it, or as if he—"

"You were about to add something else, doctor."

"Or, as if he had taken a sleeping potion upon retiring and had not recovered from the effects of it. I left him to tell his wife. I came away. There seemed to be nothing for me to do."

"The old gentleman did not ask you to remain?"

"No. He did not seem to realize in the least what he was about at all."

"What, in your opinion, doctor, will be the effect upon that household, of this calamity?"

"It will be terrible. I read to think of it."

"Tell me what you think."

"I cannot tell you without making a confession."

"It will not be a confession, doctor, for I know already what you would say. You have told me half a dozen times since I have been in this room. You are in love with Mercedes."

"My Lord, Carter—"

"Never mind protests. You are in love with Mercedes. If you have not told her of your love, you have, at least, permitted her to discover it. You were not repulsed as you feared to be, indeed, let us say that you were led to hope, and now, since her return from the West, all your hopes have been blighted. This condition of mind has warped your judgment in some respects, but it has also, perhaps, made it keener in others."

"Now to return: What will be the general effect of this calamity upon the house of Danton?"

"Almost annihilation, I fear. If Mercedes is really in the condition of mind I fear she is, it will kill her. It will destroy the mother's mind entirely, and if I have not forgotten all I have learned in my profession, the old gentleman will not survive the shock for long."

"The blow which struck Reginald Danton to the heart has also reached the vitals of his father, mother, and sister."

"Doctor," said Nick, changing the subject abruptly, "do you remember a young woman who was once Mercedes Danton's maid—a young woman who afterward attempted, with the assistance of one Paul Rogers, to put the entire Danton family out of existence—a young woman who is almost the counterpart in feature and voice of Mercedes Danton? In other words, do you remember Isabel Benton?"*

"Indeed I do."

"Has it occurred to you that Isabel Benton may be in the neighborhood, and that it was, perhaps, her hand which struck the dagger to the heart of Reginald Danton last night?"

"But," exclaimed the doctor, "Isabel Benton is not now a member of the household, she could not have doped the father, worried the mother, and poisoned the mind of Mercedes, even if she was near enough to creep upon the piazza and murder Reginald."

"Granted. Still, Isabel Benton is a remarkable woman. She can accomplish many things which would appear as impossible to another, less expert in villainy than she has proved herself to be."

"What do you mean by the insinuation, Carter?"

"I mean that I see the hand of Isabel Benton in all that has happened here since the return of Mercedes from the West. She may not be in that house, but she has an emissary in it, I am sure. She may not have doped the father and worried the mother, as you express it, but I am reasonably certain that she could, if she would, tell us who has done it, and I am as reasonably certain that in some way she could, if she would, explain the extraordinary actions of Mercedes."

"Mercedes Danton was not herself when I saved her from the fire, but I attributed that circumstance to shock and suffering, for she certainly did suffer; now, however, there has been time for her to recover. Come; let us go to the coroner. I want to get inside the house at the Fells as soon as possible."

CHAPTER IV.

"YOUR RIGHT HAND! THERE IS BLOOD UPON IT!"

It will be remembered that Patsy Garvan came on the train to Linden Fells with the detective, but he did not accompany Nick Carter to the house of the doctor. Instead, the detective dispatched him at once to the scene of the murder.

He sent him, moreover, without giving him any special instructions.

He was directed simply to go to Linden Fells, and to pick up whatever information there might be floating about outside the house, and as this was a department in the detective's work in which Patsy was especially proficient, Nick felt assured that the young assistant would have acquired considerable knowledge of a general character by the time they met again.

In this he was not mistaken.

After the interview with the coroner, from which Nick gleaned nothing whatever that was new, but with a note of introduction and recommendation to the officer in charge at the house, Nick started for Linden Fells.

He found Patsy seated on a mossy bank near the gate awaiting him, and he crossed the road and seated himself beside his young assistant.

"Nailed anything, Patsy?" he asked.

"Not much. They are the stupidest lot of servants I ever saw, but there is one interesting point about them—they are all new."

"All new?" asked Nick. "Do you mean that the old servants of the family, many of whom have been here for years, have gone?"

"That's about the size of it. As far as I can learn, there is not a single one of the old servants left on the place, in the stable, in the garden, or in the house."

"That is strange. How long have these new people been here?"

"Some of them a week, some not so long. Some of them almost a month. Not one of them has been there any longer than that."

"A month. Humph! Mercedes returned about a month ago. Who has made all the changes?"

"Nobody seems to know the answer to that question. If there was only one of the old servants left, a fellow might find out something, but the last one of them has gone."

"There is one, however, who doesn't live far away from here. I'll look her up if you say so."

"Is it Sarah Kearney?"

"Yes."

"Find her by all means. Let that be your next duty; and report to me as soon as you have seen her."

"Correct."

"What is the general talk among the servants about the murder?"

"I couldn't pick up but one fact which amounted to information."

"What was that?"

"One of the stableboys says he saw Reginald Danton come home this morning. He said it was shortly after the train from New York arrived at the station."

"About half past one?"

"Yes. Reginald, according to his story, came up the walk as usual and went up on the piazza. The boy didn't look that way again till about half an hour later, and then

*For the stories concerning Isabel Benton read Nos. 60, 64, 65, and 70 of the NICK CARTER STORIES.

he says he saw a woman on the piazza, talking with Reginald."

"Patsy," said Nick slowly, "you give me that information in a tone which doesn't mean anything particularly, and yet it would seem important. Do you think the boy lied?"

"No; I think he was mistaken. When I questioned him and nailed him down to facts, all he could swear that he saw was something white, like a woman's dress. He did not even see that it was a woman, or, if it was, that there was anybody there with her. It might have been nothing more than—"

"Than what?"

"Well, if Reginald Danton wore a white vest, it might have been that and nothing more."

"How did the boy happen to be up at that hour?"

"He had been down to the city and came up on that train himself, but he jumped off the moment it reached the station, and hurried home. He sleeps in the stable, and he was looking out of the window when he saw the white figure on the piazza—or thinks he did."

"There isn't much to that boy's information, but, all the same, I will have a talk with him."

"Now, I want you to look up Sarah Kearney at once," continued the detective. "You can meet me here again shortly after dark."

As Nick Carter walked up the pathway toward the house, he glanced surreptitiously under his hat rim at the windows of the rooms he knew were occupied by Mercedes, and his keen eyes discovered at once that some person was concealed behind the shutters of one of them, engaged in intently watching his approach.

"Can that be Mercedes, or is it her maid?" he asked himself mentally; "and would either of them be shrewd enough to penetrate a disguise? I think not. Besides, very few persons know that Joshua Juniper is a disguise at all."

He passed on into the house, saw the officer in charge of the place, placed there by the order of the coroner, was at once given the run of the house, and immediately began his system of research.

First he sought the room to which the body had been taken, but there he could discover nothing, for if there had been any traces of any kind, left behind by the assassin, they had been effectually removed by the undertaker and his assistants in their work.

Nevertheless, there was a startling surprise in store for the detective, and he found it awaiting him when he emerged from the room of death.

The door to that room was set slightly back into the wall, so that there was a recess in front of it, quite deep enough to conceal a person in entering or coming out of it; and as he closed the door behind him he heard the sound of a light footfall approaching rapidly along the corridor.

He halted where he stood, with his hand still on the knob of the door, and waited.

Then, in another instant the figure of a woman turned abruptly into the recess, and fairly collided with him.

She started back with a cry of surprise and alarm when she perceived that another was there before her, but Nick did not give her a chance to speak, for he turned the handle of the door, pushed it open behind him and stepped back into the room.

"You were coming to this room?" he asked politely; and it was when the woman replied to him that he experienced what he afterward called "one of the surprises of his life."

"Yes," she replied, following him and waiting for him to close the door again, with them inside the room; and it was not what she said, but the voice in which she spoke that surprised the detective—for it was a voice which he instantly recognized.

In the half obscurity of the hallway he had not seen her face, but now he stepped back so that the light from the window shone full upon it, and he had to acknowledge to himself that the disguise was almost perfect. So perfect, in fact, that he might himself have passed the woman in the street a dozen times without recognizing her, unless his attention had for some reason been especially called to her.

"Cora Tempest," was the mental comment he made; but his face gave no indication of his surprise. It was at once evident to him that she had no idea of his own identity, and he wondered if she even knew that there was a detective in the house at all.

But that she was Cora Tempest was certain.

True, she had covered her own copper-colored hair with a wig of tresses as black as the wing of a crow, save where it was slightly intermixed with gray; and she had traced a crow's foot upon each temple, so lightly and evenly that its presence was hardly noticeable, save to add a suggestion of years to her countenance.

Her eyes, naturally dark, of reddish-brown, seemed to have been rendered almost black under the shadow of the raven hair, and deft touches here and there had so altered the general appearance of her face that while she was actually without much disguise, she was still thoroughly transformed.

Cora Tempest had been known to Nick Carter while she was still a child. Once, in the long ago, she had given the detective timely warning of a peril which threatened him, and had so saved his life. After that, she had disappeared for a long time, only to reappear again after she had blossomed into womanhood—full and exquisitely beautiful womanhood—but also as the seemingly willing dupe of Isabel Benton.

As Cora "Dumont," she had been implicated in the mysterious Chicago burglaries, but she had revealed herself to Nick, who had not seen her since she was a child, and because she had betrayed Isabel Benton to the detective she had been condemned to death along with Nick Carter in the burning house in the suburbs of the Lake City.

Could it be possible that after all her protestations to Nick, she had again linked her fortunes with Isabel Benton? Was it possible that she was the emissary to which Nick had referred when he told the doctor that if Isabel Benton was not an inmate of the house at Linden Fells, she at least had a representative there?

It is not surprising that Nick regarded her presence with amazement, for he had decided in his own mind that Cora Tempest was a woman to be trusted, notwithstanding her temporary wandering from the path of rectitude.

He had replaced her almost in the same niche in his regard that she had occupied when she was a schoolgirl and lived in the same street with him, opposite his own home, and could it be that he had misjudged her totally? Could it be that she was a traitor to him, and to every protestation she had made regarding her future?

It seemed to him in that first instant of discovery, that

there could be only one explanation of her presence in the house at Linden Fells, and that one was certainly not to her credit.

Involuntarily, almost, he let his eyes fall to her right hand, for the question shot into his mind, "Could that hand be the one which had struck the death-blow through the heart of Reginald Danton?"

But the detective had not experienced all his surprises yet, for the instant the door was closed, Cora Tempest placed her back against it, and very slowly and deliberately asked:

"Who are you, sir, and why are you here? What right have you in this room?"

"The right of an officer who has been sent here by the coroner to investigate this murder," replied Nick coldly. "So now, if you please, I will ask you the same questions."

"I had not been told that a detective was here," she replied. "I am exceedingly glad that you are such, however. I am the housekeeper."

"The housekeeper, eh?" said the detective. "Will you tell me why you came to this room in such a hurry just now, if you please?"

"Certainly; because I saw you pass through the hall. I watched you and saw you enter this room. Not knowing who you were, and what you wanted, I made it my business to inquire."

"Quite proper," replied Nick; "and now that you are here, and we are alone together, I'll make it my business to institute a few inquiries myself."

Then suddenly altering his tone the detective demanded savagely:

"Let me see your hand—your right hand, woman! There is blood upon it!"

CHAPTER V.

WHERE THE FINGER OF SUSPICION POINTS.

Without an instant's hesitation and with a calm, superior smile upon her face, Cora Tempest extended her right hand toward the detective.

"I fear that you are but a poor detective if you leap at conclusions in that manner," she said.

Nick did not reply, but he took Cora Tempest's hand in his own and held it for an instant, and then, somewhat to his surprise, he felt a tremor dart through her and communicate its throbbing impulse to his own person.

Instantly he released her hand and stepped back a pace, and he could see that even though the coating of bismuth and chalk with which she had imparted that transparent whiteness to her skin, the quick blood had rushed to the surface in a flush of consciousness, and that her eyes were sparkling wondrously.

"Can it be possible that she has recognized me from the touch of my hand?" he asked himself; but already the bright light had fled from her eyes and her face had resumed its pallor.

But, being released from the clasp of his hand, she stepped back, away from him, and passed to the opposite side of the bier, so that they stood with the corpse of Reginald Danton between them.

"You are the housekeeper, you say. What is your name?" asked Nick.

"Dawson," she replied laconically.

"Miss, or Mrs?" persisted Nick.

"My employers have not as yet dignified me by either title," she replied. "I am called Dawson."

"Very well, Dawson. How long have you occupied your present position?"

"Two weeks to-day."

"Indeed! Then you are among the newly recruited servants?"

"All the servants in this house are newly recruited, sir," she remarked, very coldly, and with a strangely enigmatical smile.

"What do you mean by that, Dawson? The manner of your reply is suggestive of more behind it."

"Being a detective, you should be able to reply to that question yourself, sir."

"Do you mean that the 'help' in this house is new throughout?"

"Yes, and it would seem as if you already should have remarked that fact."

"How many have been here longer than you?" insisted Nick, ignoring her sarcasm.

"Three, I think, or four. Not more."

"Who employed you?"

"Miss Danton. She is mistress of the household."

"Indeed. I was told that she is invalidated to her room and sees nobody."

"She sees the new servants, sir."

"Ah! Again that innuendo. Might I venture to inquire the hidden meaning of your replies to my questions, Dawson?"

"There is no hidden meaning at all."

"Tell me how and why you were employed, then."

"I was employed in the usual way—by being engaged by the mistress to serve. I suppose the reason was that she needed a housekeeper; and I happened to suit."

"Good!" Nick Carter appreciated a sharp tongue and a quick wit, and he saw that Cora had not lost the abilities of either of hers.

For an instant he thought of the wisdom of revealing to her who he was, and at the same moment he determined to await developments.

As he looked into Cora's eyes and heard her voice, all his trust in her returned. He could not bring himself to believe that she was an accomplice of the woman whom he held responsible for all the ills that had happened and were to happen in that house—and yet, his theory of putting two and two together almost compelled him to believe that she could not be there for a good reason.

"What good reason could there have been to bring her here at all?" he asked himself.

Once, upon a historic occasion, Cora Tempest had calmly confessed that she loved the detective, and at that time, looking into her matchless eyes, Nick Carter had felt his senses thrill with pleasure that he should be so regarded by such a beautiful woman. What man would not, when added to the confession, there is the knowledge that it is the absolute truth.

Later, upon that same historic occasion, she had charged him with loving Mercedes Danton, and for a moment, when the young heiress needed assistance, she had hesitated to render it, because of the fiercely jealous rage that had surged in her heart at the time.

But later, Cora devoted herself to Mercedes—or, at least, she had seemingly done so.

And Cora and Nick had parted the best of friends. They had parted with a renewal of the old-time confidence that had existed between them when she, as a child, had watched for him in the street before her home, and had managed upon every possible opportunity to win a bow and a smile from her hero.

He had replaced her in his memory as that beautiful child of such great promise. He had forced himself to eliminate from his memory all that had happened since then to alter his judgment concerning her.

And yet, when they met in Chicago, there were environments about her which could not redound to her benefit in his estimation—environments which might be explained away, and for which she need not be held culpably responsible.

But the fact remained that she had been a friend and accomplice of Isabel Benton, even though she did not and could not know the depths of villainy of her associate.

Then—at that time—Nick was quite willing to believe that Cora was nothing more than Isabel's dupe; but now, she could not be a dupe. That explanation would not suffice now.

Cora Tempest had no need to serve as a servant in any household for her livelihood. She was independent of such a life.

Then why had she chosen to appear in the home of the Dantons in disguise, and as a servant, if it were not for the all-sufficient reason that she was there for evil? For the purpose of aiding and assisting the machinations of Isabel Benton, and of doing harm to Mercedes Danton and the other members of her family.

Truly appearances were against her—terribly against her, it seemed.

And yet, as Nick looked into her eyes he could see no guile there. He wondered, vaguely, if his own were blurred by his admiration for this woman. He wondered if his regard for her had been really greater than he had admitted to himself, and if he was disposed to permit his inclinations to warp his judgment.

He drew farther away from her into the recess of the window, and in that instant he determined to treat her as a suspected person until he knew positively to the contrary.

"We will leave the question of your employment," he said coldly, "and come directly to—this," and he raised his hand and pointed at the corpse between them. "What do you know about this?"

"I know that Reginald Danton is dead. That seems to be the sum of all knowledge in this house at present," she replied.

"You were in the house when the murder was committed?" continued Nick.

"Naturally. I have not been out of it since I came here as housekeeper, save to walk in the garden two or three times."

"You were familiar with the habits of the family?"

"As familiar as one may become during an experience of two weeks."

"Had Reginald, in that time, and to your knowledge, slept in that chair on the piazza?"

"Frequently. Often, I should say, than he has slept in his bed, save, of course, that he inevitably sought his bed after being awakened from his sleep in the piazza chair."

"This habit was generally known throughout the house, was it not?"

"No; I do not think so."

"Indeed. Why not?"

"I have informed you that the servants are all new to the place. Doubtless the old servants—those who have been discharged during the last month—knew about this custom of his, but among the new ones—and they are all new—I do not think it was known save to Jane Belden and myself."

"And possibly his valet."

"Are you a detective, and have not yet discovered that Reginald Danton has had no valet for more than a week?" she asked, smiling aggravatingly into his face.

Nick shrugged his shoulders. Truly her tongue was sharp, and she knew how to spice the information she chose to give him, after a manner which was certainly her own.

"Then you think, as a matter of fact, that this habit of his was really entirely unknown to others in the house than you and the servant, Jane Belden?"

"I did not say so; I said to other servants in the house."

"Ah! Then it was known to his father and mother—and sister."

"To the young mistress of the house, without question, I cannot say as to the parents."

"There is an insinuation in your reply, Dawson. Please cut that kind of thing out."

"Unintentional, I assure you. You must take it for what it is worth, sir."

"How is it that Reginald had no valet?"

"The old one was discharged in his absence. A new one was disposed of in the same manner. A third met the same fate, and—the fourth has not yet appeared. Perhaps he became tired of obtaining new ones only to have them immediately dismissed by the young mistress, who is too ill to leave her rooms, save when there is very little light to—to affect her eyes."

Nick advanced a step, quickly.

"Woman," he said sharply, "your insinuations have gone too far for me to permit them to pass unnoticed any longer."

"Do you mean to tell me that Mercedes Danton has willfully dismissed the old servants and taken on new ones? Do you mean that she has willfully deprived her brother of a body servant? Do you mean— Bah! what do you mean?"

"I mean that she has done these things you mention. Whether the doing of them might be termed willful or not, is for you, as a detective, to determine. I can only say that it has been done, and by her."

"Are you prepared to swear that you, Jane Belden, and Mercedes Danton, are the only persons who were aware of Reginald's habit of sleeping on the piazza?"

"Yes."

"And are you equally aware that the responsibility for his death, in that case, narrows itself to three persons? Do you realize that, in such a case, nothing short of the arrest and conviction of a stranger, can keep suspicion from falling upon Mercedes Danton, Jane Belden—and yourself?"

"You forget one other," she replied, smiling coldly at him. "You neglected to include, in your rather sweeping assertion, the young mistress of the house."

CHAPTER VI.

"TO SAVE THE WOMAN YOU LOVE."

"Mercedes Danton!" exclaimed Nick. "No, I did not forget her, I did not even think of her."

"And yet," said Cora slowly, and with intense irony, "you are a detective."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and refrained from giving expression to the annoyance he felt at her persistency. Coldly he asked:

"Would you openly charge the sister of this dead man with his death?"

"No. But I insist that if the finger of suspicion should point at Jane Belden, or at me, it has still more reason to point at my mistress. She possessed the same knowledge, and it is evident that motive might be discovered in her case where none could be found in ours."

"Nonsense!"

"Do detectives permit personal sentiments to enter into their work?"

"Sometimes. We need not discuss that."

"There seem to be many things, according to the estimation in which you hold them, which we need not discuss, sir."

"Doubtless. Let us return to Reginald's habit of sleeping in the chair. How long have you known that such was his habit?"

"Since the first morning after my arrival in this house, Mr. Detective."

"Indeed. How often have you seen him there? Asleep, I mean."

"He has slept there almost every morning, from half past one till daylight, since I came here. It rained once, I think, and then he went straight to his room, but I think that is the only exception."

"Have you been in the habit of roaming through the house at such hours, that you are aware of so much concerning him?"

"I am at least aware of that much."

"You have seen him there with your own eyes, each time, have you? You have depended upon the evidence of your own senses, and not upon the reports made to you by Jane Belden?"

"I speak only of the times I have seen him myself— which has been every time."

"Did you see him there this morning?" asked Nick suddenly.

"I did," she replied calmly.

"At what time?"

"About four o'clock."

"At four o'clock! That was after he was killed. He was stone-dead at that time."

"Yes."

"Did you know it, when you saw him?"

"Certainly. I went quite close to him and looked at him to make sure that he was dead."

"Good heavens! Do you mean that you expected to find him dead?"

"I have expected to find him dead each morning when I have gone there to look at him," said the young woman calmly. "I have been surprised when I have discovered that he was still living, and so what I discovered this morning, while it was a shock, was hardly in the nature of a surprise."

"Do you realize that you are convicting yourself of at least complicity in this crime by your admissions?"

"I know that I am not."

"Bah! You talk in enigmas."

"Only because you refuse to see the truth, sir."

"If you expected to find that he had been murdered, why in Heaven's name did you not take measures to prevent such a crime?"

"I have done so as well as it could be done."

"How?"

"By warning him."

"Warning him?"

"Yes; I have told him that his life was threatened. I have told him that he ought not to sleep there on the piazza. I have warned him that he would sleep without waking if he persisted in the habit; and I told him some of my reasons why I thought so; but he only laughed at me. He did not, or would not believe me."

"And so you have gone there to look at him every morning at four o'clock? Your explanation of this strange conduct is that you were watching over him. Is that it?"

"I do not offer it as an explanation. I give it merely as a statement."

"And that is why you have made a practice of wandering about the house at that early hour in the morning, is it?"

"No. I have wandered about the house at that early hour in the morning because I hoped to be present when his life was attempted, and to save him."

"To save him! Save him from whom?"

"From the one who would have murdered him; from the one whom I think did murder him."

"Ah! Now we are getting at it. You mean yourself. You mean that you had been instructed to kill him. You mean that you had agreed to do so. You mean that your conscience revolted and that you warned him, in order to save him from yourself. You mean that you went there each morning with the intention of striking the blow, but that at the last moment your courage failed you, and you came away. You mean that you did not really dare to do the deed until this morning. Is not that what you mean?"

"Not at all. I have meant nothing of the sort."

"Then whose was the hand you intended to stay at the last moment?"

"My mistress."

Nick frowned heavily.

"Having committed the awful deed, you would now commit a worse one, and charge your own crime to an innocent and beautiful young woman?" the detective said icily.

For reply, Cora Tempest advanced a step nearer to the detective, and, bending a little forward, she said, very slowly:

"I charge the young woman who is mistress of this house with the murder of Reginald Danton. Make of that statement what you will. I do not seek to prove it, for I know that you will prove it yourself before you have been here a day longer."

"I will prove it? I? But wait. Before I take you into custody, as I must do, I think, let me ask you other questions. If you charge Mercedes Danton with this crime, what reason, or reasons, have you for doing so?"

"I need not reply to those questions—now."

"No, you need not, but you will. It is a part and parcel of this strange story you tell that your mistress has also."

made these pilgrimages to the chair on the porch where her brother was sleeping?"

"Yes."

"And on the occasions when you have gone there, seeking to save him from being murdered, do you mean to say that you have followed her there?"

"I have followed her there on each occasion—save one."

"And that one—"

"Was this morning."

"When, you would say, she got there before you. You were too late. Her hellish work, or words to that effect, was already done. Is that it?"

"That is it."

"Allow me to say that for cool effrontery you beat the band, Miss—Dawson. Would you care to add to your statement, that on each occasion she has gone there armed and prepared to strike?"

"No"—calmly, and without appearing to notice the sarcasm of his question—"I have not, on any occasion, seen a weapon of any sort in her possession."

"Indeed! That is remarkable!" and Nick smiled ironically. "Has she always sought him at the hour of four in the morning?"

"Not always. Sometimes earlier, sometimes later, but usually between three and four."

"And on each occasion you have watched for her, expecting her to go there, you have followed her, intending to stay the fatal blow, you have acted the part of a guardian angel, only to fail at the last moment, and to be absent upon the one occasion among them all when she had determined to strike."

"Jove, woman! of all improbable tales, yours will become the standard."

"And yet," she replied, "within twenty-four hours—nay, within an hour, you will believe every word of it." Nick smiled incredulously.

"Come," he said, "let us proceed. How was it that you missed your mistress this morning?"

"I was weary from loss of sleep. I slept. I did not awaken till four. When I did awaken I knew that she had left her rooms, and—"

"How did you know that?"

"Because I kept a slender thread stretched from the knob of her door across the hall. It was not strong enough for her to feel its resistance when she opened the door, but it could only be broken by the opening of the door. It was broken when I awoke."

"So you knew Miss Danton had left her room. What did you do then?"

"I hastened to the piazza."

"Expecting to find that Reginald had been killed?"

"Fearing it, and yet I hoped that this expedition might have been as the others."

"You found, however, that she had selected this time to strike. Still you did not give the alarm. You, returned quietly to your room, and—"

"On the contrary, I left the house at once. That is, as soon as I had written a hasty letter to New York. I took it to the post office and dropped it in the mail box. Then I returned to my room and waited, for I expected that the person to whom I had written would wish me to do so. I did not give the alarm—I permitted Jaue Belden to discover the body and to summon the authorities, because I hoped all the time that the person to whom I had written would wish me to do so."

"Indeed! You relate wonderful stories. Who is that person to whom you wrote a letter while the body of a murdered man slowly growing cold almost beside you—while a murderess was sleeping the sleep of the just within a few feet of you, according to your tale—while a man whom you had sought to protect from the very fate he had met, was dead, almost in your presence?"

Cora raised her eyes to Nick's then, as she replied brokenly:

"If you had not taken my hand in yours when you entered this room, I would not have replied to that question, but although neither my eyes nor my voice could penetrate your disguise, I knew you the instant your hand touched mine, I knew you then, as well as you knew me. I sent the letter to you, Nick Carter, and if you did not receive it, it is because you left your house before it arrived."

"The touch of your hand betrayed you to me. I knew that you recognized me, and I have sought, all this time, to win some expression of confidence from you. I have done all this for you. I have done it all to save Mercedes Danton, the woman you are so fond of—to save her for you; and I have won only suspicion and scorn."

CHAPTER VII.

THE REVELATIONS OF CORA.

Nick Carter regarded his companion silently, for great tears had come into her eyes, and he saw that it needed only a word to send them flooding down her cheeks.

But presently, when she had grown calmer, he broke the silence.

"Cora," he said gently, "if I have appeared to distrust you, it was because I forced myself to do so against my inclination. Even now, my judgment as a detective ought to compel me to place you under arrest, for appearances, take them all in all, are terribly against you. Even your statement about the letter seems to be one which might be questioned, because I did not leave my house until after the second delivery of the mail this morning, and a letter mailed here at the time you say you posted yours should have reached me in the first one."

"Hush! I do not say that I do not believe you. On the contrary, I do believe you, but it is belief in you that I feel; not belief in the appearance of things. That is against you."

"I saw that you flushed when I touched your hand a while ago, and for an instant I wondered then if you knew me, but you acted the part that you did not, and did it so well that I had forgotten that you might have done so."

Still she did not reply, and after a moment more of silence, he added:

"Cora, I believe in you. Nothing short of positive conviction could make me doubt you now. You have been here two whole weeks. You came here, you say, for my sake. Will you be a little more explicit, and tell me why?"

"I have already told you why."

"Aye, one reason, but not all. You came here, you say, to save Mercedes Danton. Why?"

"Because—can you ask me that? You love Mercedes, and—"

"Hush, Cora! You are mistaken. I do not love Mercedes, save as a dear friend—save as one who deserves everything that is good at my hands. As to this, I give you my word of honor. Now tell me all you have to tell."

"You do love her. I knew it long ago. I knew it before I made myself known to you in Chicago. I hated her then. I would have joined with the devil himself to get her out of the way. That was why I listened to the projects of Isabel Benton. That was why I felt and acted like a tigress when we were saved from the fire in Chicago—that is why I am here."

"You are paradoxical, Cora. How can that be why you are here?"

"Because I believed that by coming here, and rendering you a great service, I could at least win back the regard I had lost, or, failing in that, I could win back my own self-esteem, and incidentally do you a great service."

"Still I do not understand."

"I came here to save Mercedes Danton's life."

"Do you think, then, that she is also in imminent danger?"

"She is in peril as great as that which threatened her brother an hour before his death. The ax hangs over her, and it may fall at any moment, but from what quarters, I cannot determine."

"How do you know this, Cora?"

"I do not know it. I only dread it, fear it, suspect that it is true."

"Explain what you mean."

"How can I explain when I know nothing—really? How can I make you understand all that I fear, when as a matter of fact I have only my own suspicions to go upon?"

"At least tell me what those suspicions are."

"The first and most important above all others is, that I do not believe that Mercedes Danton is Mercedes Danton at all."

"You speak in enigmas."

"I know I do; and yet it is impossible for me to be plainer. But let us go back to the time in Chicago when you saved, or supposed that you saved, Mercedes from the burning house."

"Well?"

"Do you remember that when you and I escaped from the house together, your first thought was to rescue Mercedes, whom you had good reason to believe was a prisoner in another part of that same house?"

"Certainly."

"Do you remember how you seized an ax and dashed up the stairs? How at the top of the stairs you heard a voice calling to you for help from the other side of a partition, and that you broke your way through it to find her, tied to the bed, on the other side of it, and that the fire was already in the room, that the bed had already caught the flames, that her clothing was actually on fire, and that when you finally struggled with her through the smoke and flame, her hair was singed and crimped, and curled by the heat, and that her face was scorched and red and inflamed?"

"Certainly, I remember it all. Why do you ask?"

"Do you think that you could possibly identify Mercedes Danton under such circumstances?"

"That is a strange question to ask."

"Do you? Remember, her face was scorched and inflamed, her hair was singed and colorless. Her voice was hoarse and husky with the smoke and heat."

"Do you think that you, or even her own brother, could positively identify her under such circumstances?"

"I think——"

"Wait. Do you think that anybody could identify her under such circumstances, if perhaps it were not she at all, but another who was trying to impersonate her?"

"You mean, if instead of Mercedes, the person I saved were in reality Isabel?"

"Yes; that is what I mean."

"But it could not have been Isabel."

"Granted, for the sake of the argument. Still, let us say that it was Isabel, also for the sake of the argument. Do you suppose, if it had been Isabel, that under the circumstances, you—even you—could have told the difference?"

"No. Nobody could have told the difference."

"So. Do you remember that when you called me to your aid in assisting her after you had taken her from the house, I hesitated, because—because I was——"

"Yes; I remember."

"And that then I went to her and sought to do all that I could for her? I know that you do, for you looked your appreciation at the time. Do you remember how I worked over her?"

"Certainly, I remember it."

"While I worked over her, she opened her eyes and looked up at me. For an instant it seemed as if she were about to speak, but she did not; still she looked at me—and there was that in her eyes, inflamed by heat and smoke though they were, which I have never seen save, in one pair of eyes in all the world—the eyes of Isabel Benton."

"It is preposterous, Cora."

"Never mind, listen to me to the end. Perhaps you may discover a method in my madness, after all."

"Go on, then."

"When I caught that look in her eyes, I started back, for on the instant I thought it was Isabel you had saved. But then I remembered the fright, the fire, the smoke, the heat, the terror of her experience, and I forced the thought away from me. I argued that it could not be Isabel."

"Certainly not. How could she have been so nearly consumed in a fire of her own building? How could she have got herself tied to the bed in that room from which I saved her?"

"Do you imagine that her plotting had gone so far, or pierced so deep that she was willing to risk her own life almost to the point of losing it, and certainly to the point of losing her beauty?"

"No. I could not think so—then. But later, the suspicion returned to me."

"It is not tenable, Cora."

"Wait. It may not be; but look at what has happened since that time."

"Very well."

"Suppose it were Isabel?"

"What then?"

"Why, if it were Isabel, and she had passed muster under your eyes—under the sharp eyes of Nick Carter—she had succeeded in disarming the only foe she really feared. If it were Isabel, you had taken her from the fire at the risk of your own life, believing her to be Mercedes. You had conducted her personally to the house where she was attended after the fire, and from which her own brother came to take her away and bring her

back to New York. You had delivered her over to her family as Mercedes, and yet all the while it was Isabel."

"Go on, Cora."

"Somewhere in the world Mercedes herself was a prisoner—somewhere where Isabel had placed her, and where could she have placed her, think you, supposing all my suspicions to be true?"

"Who can say?"

"I can say—I can!"

"Then say it, for God's sake!"

"I can say, for I have heard Isabel threaten what she would do, or what she once thought of doing, when she feared that, even if she murdered Mercedes, she might encounter difficulties in ridding herself of the body."

"What did she threaten?"

"She said there were madhouses in the land where they took patients without being too particular concerning their antecedents, provided there was plenty of money paid for the accommodation."

"She was right about that."

"She said that she could place Mercedes in one of those private madhouses, that she could take her there herself, and because of their wonderful resemblance to each other, represent her as her own twin sister. Now, do you follow me?"

"Not quite, Cora."

"Then listen. After my first suspicions found root, they grew and grew, until they amounted to certainty. From asking myself if the woman you saved from the fire were not really Isabel Benton, I became convinced that she was and is Isabel."

"I remembered the madhouse threat she had made, and I argued, what more natural than that Isabel should put Mercedes in an asylum under the name of Benton, return to the house in which she had held her a prisoner, set it afire, plan so that you should save her from the flames—as you did—and, in short, I investigated on my own account."

"You investigated? How?"

"By paying a Chicago detective to search every asylum and sanitarium in that vicinity, for an inmate named Isabel or Mercedes Benton. I did well, too, for to-day—almost within the hour—since you have been in this house, in fact, I have received this," and Cora Tempest drew a letter from her bosom and gave it to Nick Carter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S MURDEROUS WORK.

The detective spread the letter open before him and read it aloud. It was short and to the point.

"CHICAGO, August 30, 190—.

"MADAM: There is a patient named Mercedes Benton at 'Perfect Rest' Sanitarium, just outside the limits of the village of Calais, in this State. She is about twenty or twenty-one years old, dark, Spanish type, very beautiful, perfect teeth, black eyes, five feet four in height, graceful, educated, well-bred. Said to be afflicted with peculiar form of mania. Believes herself to be an heiress and claims the name of Danton. Put here by sister, but claims she has no sister. Receives the best of care. Has large and comfortable room to herself and attendant, but is not allowed liberty at all. Never leaves her room. I obtained situation there as attendant, remained a week

and so obtained this information from one of the female attendants. Did not see the patient myself.

"Awaiting your further orders, I am, respectfully yours,
"JASPER GOLDING."

What do you think of that?" asked Cora, when Nick had finished reading the letter.

"It seems to support your theory," he replied.

"Does it not prove it?"

"In effect, it does. You received it to-day—since—"

"Since you have been in the house. The postman brought it not more than ten minutes before I encountered you."

"Cora," said Nick slowly, after a moment's pause, "you have done nobly in this matter. You have acted with great wisdom and forethought. You ventured into this house on mere suspicion, but in order to be present and to prevent, if possible, the catastrophe that has fallen, as well as others that were likely to occur. How shall I thank you?"

"Hush!" she said. "Do not try to thank me. It is little enough that I have done. If the person you saved from the fire had been a man, you would have been less conservative in your assistance, and would never have been imposed upon. As it was, you were satisfied that you had rescued Mercedes."

"But even now, Cora, it seems almost incredible that Isabel Benton could have dared to bring herself so near to death by flames, for the sake of carrying out her plot to the end."

"Aye, but remember that we do not know all her plans. Remember that the negro, although you sent for him, came to the room after he had started the fire. He locked himself in the room through his own stupidity, and you knocked him on the head before he had a chance to tell what he might have been instructed to say."

"True! Sure! I see it all now. He was to tell that a woman was tied to a bed in another part of the house, she knowing that I would hurry to the rescue. She planned that I would rescue her almost exactly as it turned out, only that I should do it a little sooner. Cora, you should be a detective."

"I want to become one. I want you to teach me."

"Teach you? Why, child, you have taught me more to-day than I could teach you in a year, for you have taught me to—"

"To what, Nick?"

"That we had better return to the affairs of the moment at once."

"Are you satisfied now that the Mercedes Danton who is in this house is no other than Isabel Benton?"

"Perfectly."

"And if that is true—"

"Well?"

"Who killed Reginald Danton?"

"Isabel."

"Will you tell me what to do next?"

"Yes. Go to your young mistress at once. Tell her that a detective, one Joshua Juniper, is here, sent by the coronor."

"Say that Nick Carter was sent for, but that he was out of the city, and that the chief of police recommended this man Juniper. Arrange an interview at once."

"And if she refuses to see you?"

"In that case I will go to her room without her permission."

"Is that all the direction you have to give?"

"At present, yes. I will wait for you in the library. You may leave me here. I will go to the library in ten minutes."

Cora turned away and crossed the room to the door, but there she hesitated.

Presently she retraced her steps and stood silent before the detective.

"Well?" he asked tentatively.

"Have I won back your confidence and regard?" she said, in a low tone.

"You have won much more than that, Cora, just how much, I will tell you another time."

"You do not despise me because I love—because I have loved you ever since I was a little mite of a girl?"

"No," he said, and was silent, and she remained for a moment looking at him wistfully, and then turned away and went out of the room.

For several moments after she left him Nick Carter remained in the same attitude, deep in thought, and his mind was not on the affairs of the moment. Although he stood within reach of the dead body of Reginald Danton, he did not once glance in that direction until after a considerable interval.

Then, as with an effort, slaking himself together, he drew closer to it, and bent over the silent form.

"Poor chap," he murmured. "To be cut off in this way is an awful thing. It would seem almost as if some curse followed your family, Reginald. There will be no more wine suppers for you, my boy. No more coming home through the still hours of the morning with almost more than you can carry, and falling asleep in the chair, on the piazza. No more of that, my bright young lad. How I wish that you might have been spared to see the error of your ways and to have mended them, to have lived to become a comfort to your sweet sister."

The detective was in an introspective mood, and he folded his arms and gazed silently into the dead face before him, unmindful of the fact that behind him, at the farther side of the room, another door than the one he and Cora had used was slowly and silently swinging ajar.

There was not a sound to disturb the train of his thought, and still the door continued to swing slowly farther and farther open.

Presently the fingers of a hand could have been seen clasping the edge of the door, if the detective had turned ever so little; but he did not turn, and the door opened wider.

Then the top of a woman's head appeared in the opening, and two gleaming eyes looked from the place behind the door into the room—and still the detective did not turn.

After the top of the head and the gleaming eyes came the face—a face swathed in bandages, but arranged so that it appeared as if they were used for concealment rather than for other reasons.

Then the shoulders followed the head and face, and then—the full figure of a woman stood revealed in the doorway.

For an instant she stood revealed so that he could

have seen her plainly had he but turned toward her, but there was no sound to attract his attention, and his gaze was still fixed upon the face of his dead friend.

Then, slowly and with studied deliberation, the woman raised her right hand from the folds of her dress, and when it appeared, a revolver showed in her grasp—a revolver which she was slowly raising so that the bullet from it might be aimed at the detective's heart.

Something there was then that disturbed him. Whether it was an inner consciousness that informed him of the nearness of another person, or if he heard the rustle of a garment, can never be known. He could not have told himself.

It is certain, however, that something disturbed him, for like lightning he wheeled in his tracks.

But he started into activity too late.

The woman saw even that first impulse on his part to turn about, and she raised her arm to a level with the quickness of thought, and when Nick Carter turned, as he did, it was to meet the blinding flash of the pistol as it was fired almost in his face.

The report of it was sharp and clear, but not overloud, and the would-be murderess had correctly figured that beyond the thick walls and the heavy door of that room of death, the sound was not likely to penetrate to any considerable distance.

The flash came so suddenly when he turned that Nick could not have had time to discover whether it was a man or a woman who fired it, even had the bullet missed him; but as it was, he was hit, and he turned only to pitch forward on his face on the floor, and to lie there, as silently and as still as the corpse that rested on the bier above him.

The woman seemed not to care to study the effect of her shot, for the instant she fired she disappeared through the door again, and pulled it shut behind her; and, as it closed, a key grated in the lock, and was withdrawn, showing that she had fastened the way as she went.

* * * * *

In the library, ten minutes or so later, Cora Tempest waited for Nick Carter; but she waited in vain, for he did not come.

When half an hour had passed she became still more anxious than before, and at last she started away, determined to return to the room of death to discover there, if possible, what it was that detained him.

She had not been able to see her mistress, so she had no message to take to him; but she had been told that Miss Mercedes would see her in half an hour. Now, the half hour was up, but Cora was determined to see what it was that detained the detective before she went again to the apartments of her mistress.

It was not to be, however.

As she passed from the library into the lower hall, her mistress' maid met her.

"Miss Mercedes will see you now," she said blandly. "She wishes you to come at once."

"In a moment," replied Cora. "I have another duty just now."

"She said to come at once," insisted the maid, "and I think she meant it. She wishes you to take the detective to her, but she desires to see you first."

"Very well," replied Cora. "I will go to her."

So, instead of returning directly to the room where she had left Nick, and so finding him there, on the floor, beside the corpse of Reginald, she went directly to Mercedes Danton's room.

And there, as she entered through the doorway, she was seized and thrown to the floor, a heavy blanket was smothered over her head, and without the power to utter a sound she was borne into the inner room.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER'S AWFUL PERIL.

Into the room where the body of Reginald Danton was awaiting the hour of burial, through the same doorway that had been used by Nick Carter and Cora Tempest, a woman entered ten minutes after Cora was enticed into the room of Mercedes.

She entered and closed the door carefully behind her, and then she tiptoed across the space which separated her from the form of Nick Carter, where it was stretched senseless upon the floor.

One glance at the prone figure of the detective satisfied her, for she passed over it at once, and with the soft ends of her fingers tapped against the door which closed the entrance from which the bullet had been fired.

It was the maid—the same who had carried the message to Cora, in the library—who did all this.

The door against which she tapped so softly opened at once, and in the opening appeared the same bandaged face that had peered through it at Nick Carter's back before the bullet was fired at him.

And these women did not speak.

They uttered no sound, but strode silently into the room and paused, one at the head and one at the feet of the detective.

Then, stooping, they raised him from the floor and carried him swiftly through the open door into the room beyond; and then the door was closed silently. The key grated in the lock again and was withdrawn; and after that all was silent, and as it had been before, save for one little spot of bloodstain upon the carpet where Nick had fallen—a small spot not larger than a silver quarter.

Motion will sometimes accomplish what water will not, in the work of bringing back to consciousness persons who have been rendered senseless by blows upon the head, for motion starts up the circulation which has been for a time suspended by reason of inaction.

The detective was conscious that somebody was carrying him somewhere, but why and where he could not conjecture.

He felt the undulating motion, he was conscious of the tight hold which some person had taken upon his ankles, and he felt as if his coat was being drawn off over his head, but he could not, for the life of him, guess why this was.

He knew, too, that his head ached frightfully, and he had a vague recollection of having received some sort of a blow there, but what it was he could not remember.

Then, he was dropped with a sudden jolt upon something soft, and presently he felt again as if something were pinching his ankles, and this time, whatever it was, it held them tightly together so that he could not move them at all.

And after that, his wrists.

First one and then the other was taken in a tight grasp and seemingly held in a vise, and when he sought to move them, the effort was utterly in vain. They were fast.

Then, also, as if the mysteries about him were constantly deepening, something pressed hard against his throat—and then, with a sudden effort he roused himself out of the dreamy drowsiness into which he seemed to have fallen, and awoke to full consciousness—to find that all his dreams were true.

And at the same instant he knew why they were true, for, peering down into his now wide-open eyes was that swathed and bandaged countenance which he had not seen before, but which he had heard described, and which had looked upon him from behind in the room where the corpse of Reginald was lying.

He did not speak to the owner of that countenance. He preferred first to take an account of his situation.

He could guess that he was lying upon a bed.

He knew that his arms were stretched out to either edge of it, and that there ropes had been drawn tightly around his wrists, which in turn were tied securely to the iron frame of the bedstead.

He knew that his ankles had been roped in the same manner and that one of them had been made fast to either corner of the foot of the bed frame, and he knew that still another cord had been passed across his throat and tied to either side of the bed, in order that he might not raise his head from the position in which it had been placed.

And he realized that because of all these precautions, he had been rendered as weak as a child, from sheer impossibility to use his strength.

And then he remembered how that strength had been stolen from him in the first place.

He remembered feeling as if somebody was behind him, and turning suddenly only to face a blinding flash and a roar that had deprived him of his senses.

He knew now why his head ached.

He had been shot.

How seriously he could not determine; but that the wound was not very bad he was convinced, both by the clearness of his perceptions and by the returning strength which he felt coursing through him even though he had no opportunity to make use of it.

And still that swathed and bandaged face looked down upon him from just above his own; and even through the swathes and bandages he recognized it.

He remembered Cora, then, and he thought that only an hour ago, but for her, he might still have thought that this face belonged to Mercedes, driven mad by her injuries and sufferings and by the shock of her brother's death.

Now, however, he knew to whom it belonged, and he perceived, moreover, that she knew that he knew.

"You seem to have me on the hip, so to speak, Isabel," he said, and he smiled.

"And you seem to discover something that is amusing in the situation," she replied.

"Why not?" he asked. "You are always amusing. That is why you are interesting."

"Really. Do you know where you are, Nick Carter?"

"In the rooms of Mercedes Danton, I suppose. Where else, Isabel?"

"There is no Isabel," she returned. "Isabel is dead."

"Well," replied Nick, "one thing is quite certain: If she isn't, she ought to be."

Isabel tossed her head, then crossed the room and deliberately tore the bandages from her face.

For a moment she worked before the glass with great care, and then she returned to the bedside.

"Look," she said; and the detective was startled, so perfect was the resemblance which this fiendish woman bore to the young heiress she impersonated.

"You might almost deceive her own father and mother," he said. "Her brother you have killed and he is beyond the practice of deception now."

"It is a month since I was burned and you rescued me from the fire," she said, ignoring his remark. "I have not needed those bandages since three weeks ago, but I was afraid to appear without them, on Reginald's account, and on—"

"Mine; eh?"

"Exactly. But now that Reginald is dead, and you—"

She paused significantly.

"Well; go on. And I?"

"Now that you are as good as dead—"

"Oh, am I? I suppose it is not really your fault that I am not quite dead, is it? That bullet of yours must have given me a close shave."

"I meant to put it between your eyes, but it only shaved the side of your head, over your ear."

"Humph!" said Nick. "I hope the hair will grow again where it shaved me. Do you think it will, Isabel? I should extremely dislike to have my beauty ruined."

"Your beauty is a thing of the past, Nick Carter."

"Pshaw, Isabel! One would think I were growing old."

"No," she said, with a cruel smile, "you will not live to grow old."

"How lovely! Isabel, you are really quite a remarkable woman—you really are; but you would be much more remarkable and much more successful in your undertakings if you were not such an infernal liar, as well as— I wonder, Isabel, if it is quite proper to liken a woman to an ass; I suppose one ought really to say donkey, eh?"

Isabel laughed unreservedly, but without much mirth.

"I say, my queen of crooks," said Nick, "if I were you I'd never laugh."

"No?" said Isabel. "Why not?"

"Because a laugh is something which cannot be counterfeited. There must be purity of some form behind it, and you haven't any purity in any form, you know."

"If you laugh, after you have put Cora and me out of the way, disposed of Mercedes' father and mother, and otherwise cleared the track in front of you, somebody will find you out. Don't laugh."

"I'll remember that. I suppose, Nick Carter, it never occurred to you that every word you and Cora uttered in that room where the corpse is laid out was overheard by me."

"Well, no; it did not occur to me, Isabel. I wish it had."

"No doubt. That came near to being a very pretty love scene. If I had not happened to be there, you and Cora would have outwitted me, wouldn't you?"

"It is quite probable."

"And I had to take a desperate chance in shooting you

while you were there, but there was no other way out of it."

"Too bad, isn't it?"

"I have Cora in my power, too."

"Indeed! Since when?"

"Since just after I shot you. She is here—in this room—within the sound of our voices. You can speak to her if you like."

"Cora! Are you there?" asked the detective, raising his voice.

"Yes," came the reply from across the room.

"Have they bound you down like a roaring lion, the same as they have me?"

"I cannot move, if that is what you mean."

"Are you comfortable?"

"Quite, thank you."

"All right, my girl. Don't lose your head—or your patience. I'll have you out of this before long."

"I know you will," replied Cora, with perfect confidence and trust. "I will wait."

"Hear them!" exclaimed Isabel, with a sneer. "A pair of billing doves are jokes to you two. One would think that I intended to permit you to get up and walk out of here as if nothing had happened."

"Well," replied Nick, "I don't exactly expect that, but I do expect to walk out of here, and to take Cora with me when I go."

Isabel laughed aloud.

"Tut-tut, Nick Carter!" said she. "Do you know what walking out of here by you and Cora would mean to me?"

"It ought to mean about six electric chairs," replied Nick placidly, "but I suppose one would have to answer. I'd like to operate the thing—that is, the switches, though. By Jove! I'd turn on the current so slowly that you would dance a dozen hornpipes before you shuffled off midst flame and smoke."

"You are as facetious as ever. But do you suppose that knowing that your liberty means my death, that I contemplate for one instant that you shall ever leave that bed alive?"

"Well, no. I do not suppose you contemplate such a thing; but contemplation and reality are not always parallel, you know."

"Do you want me to tell you how I am going to kill you?"

"Why, yes; that will be real genial of you."

"I shall dose you with morphine, presently. Oh, you needn't smile; if you won't swallow it, I can administer it to you hypodermically until you are only half conscious. After that you will swallow it fast enough."

"And Cora likewise, I suppose?"

"She shall be treated in the same manner. You shall die together. I will give you to her in death even if she could not get you living."

"How infinitely kind of you."

"After the morphine—that is, after you are stupid with it, I intend to pour a teaspoonful of cyanide of potassium down your throat—and Cora's."

"How inartistic, Isabel. A teaspoonful is enough to kill a regiment."

"So be it. A teaspoonful you shall each have, and as I do not believe in delays, I will begin now. Will you swallow the morphine willingly, and so make your death an easy one, or must I force you to take it?" she asked.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT A WOMAN PUT UP.

"Before I reply to that question, Isabel, I wish you would answer one," said Nick.

"What is it?"

"I wish you would tell me how it was that you dared to risk death so nearly in the burning house near Chicago?"

"That puzzles you, does it?"

"I confess that it does. I never gave you credit for so much courage."

"The negro failed me. I never knew why until now, when I listened to the talk between you and Cora."

"So he was to tell me that you were there?"

"Yes. And he was to leave the door open so that you could escape when he left the room. I had him tie me on the bed, and I supposed the sheets were tied so that I could escape in case you were late in coming, or for any reason you did not come at all.

"But you did not come, and then when I tried to free myself, I found that he had bound me so securely that I could not escape. I think now that he did it purposely, meaning to roast me in the flames."

"Doubtless; and it is the only really good act I have heard about concerning that particular negro."

"I believed that I would be burned to death. I screamed and cried for help, and then I heard you hammering on the partition. If you had entered the room where I was, before I fainted, I should have betrayed myself to you, and all this would not have happened."

"How unfortunate that I did not do so!"

"As it was, when I opened my eyes, I saw that you had been fooled. I saw that you believed you had saved Mercedes. I was much more afraid of Cora's eyes than of yours, at that time."

"And with good reason, too, it would appear."

"No. I fooled her. My scorching was the real thing. There was no joke about it. But I hated her so that I could not avoid showing it in my eyes, and that gave her the clew."

"And after that, with the swathes and bandages, and the husky voice, you have succeeded in fooling everybody, haven't you?"

"Yes; even you. But for Cora's suspicions— Bah! what is the use of talking?"

"None whatever, believe me."

"You did not reply to my question. Will you take that morphine willingly, or shall I force it upon you?"

"Isabel, when you have lived longer and known me better, you will discover that I never walk into trouble willingly. I am afraid that you will have to make me take it, if I am to take it at all. One thing puzzles me, however."

"You are sparring for time, aren't you?"

"Perhaps, still I am nevertheless honestly puzzled."

"About what?"

"What will you do with two bodies after you have put Cora and me out of the way?"

"I'll take care of that; never fear."

"They won't be exactly—er—sanitary, you know, if you undertake to keep 'em here."

"Don't worry. I'd a whole lot rather take my chances against what you can do after you are dead, Nick Carter, than to run any risks with you living."

"You are such a practical woman," sighed Nick.

She turned away without replying and crossed the room.

Nick's head was so low upon the pillow, and the cord was so snugly across his neck, that he could not see what she was about, but he could hear the rattle of glasses and he had no doubt that she was preparing the hypodermic of morphine that she had threatened.

As the great detective waited there while she continued to make her preparation, he was forced to make the admission to himself that never in all his experiences had he been in a predicament so bad as this one.

That the ropes which bound him to the bed rendered him utterly helpless, he was assured, for already he had tried many times to do what he could to move his feet and arms, but each time utterly without success. He was as helpless as a babe and the rope across his throat rendered him as utterly helpless as if he were indeed a child.

He knew that in another moment she would return to the bedside with the little instrument in her hands, with which, with a few applications, she, weak woman though she was, could steal away his senses utterly and leave him totally at her mercy.

And he knew more than that. He knew that she had not boasted idly when she told him of the manner of his death that was to come. He knew, her too well to suppose that she would hesitate to carry out the plan she had chosen.

That she would kill both him and Cora was an established fact, provided something did not happen to prevent her, and whatever happened, he realized then and there, must come from another source than himself, for he was powerless.

Nevertheless he tried again and yet again, and while he was still trying, and with each effort more and more convinced how utterly fruitless it all was, he heard her voice beside him and knew that she had returned.

He looked up and met her cold gaze smilingly.

"Gulliver is trapped at last," she said, with a sneer. "You can't burst your bonds, can you, my powerful little giant?"

"No," replied Nick, "I cannot."

"So now, will you take your medicine, like a real good boy?" she asked banteringly.

"I have already answered that question," he told her.

"So be it," she said. "In that case I must administer it. I hope you will lie quietly while I insert the hypodermic needle in your neck. I am told that the drug takes effect much more quickly if it is applied in the neck."

"Possibly," replied Nick.

"And you will lie still?"

"I am not likely to move very much," said Nick. "I wish I might."

She bent over him until her face almost touched his own, and then, with her left hand, she drew the skin tightly along one side of his neck.

The next instant he could feel the prick of the needle as she pushed it under the skin, farther and farther, until he knew that she was ready to press the plunger and so to shoot the contents of the syringe into his system.

His mind and hers were both concentrated upon her occupation, and so, at the same instant both were startled by the sound of a heavy blow and the falling of some body to the floor.

With a loud cry, Isabel Benton withdrew the syringe from the detective's neck and leaped back, away from the bed.

And then Nick saw a remarkable thing happen.

He saw Cora Tempest dart within his range of vision, a picture of fury aroused, and he saw her seize upon Isabel Benton, and struggle with her across the floor and so out of his sight.

But if he could not see them he could hear plainly enough; aye, and sometimes feel, too, for as they struggled together they often came in contact with the bed and shook it and its occupant with the force of their exertions.

"Good girl, Cora!" called Nick to her, encouraging her with his voice as much as he could do.

"Good girl, brave girl, Cora!" he continued. "I don't know how you did it, but you got free from your bonds somehow, and you have knocked the maid senseless with a bottle or something so you could tackle Isabel alone."

"You will win, too, Cora."

"Don't try to speak to me to reassure me. You need every atom of your breath to beat Isabel, but you will beat her. You will have her on the floor and at your mercy in a moment."

"Keep it up, Cora. I'm working here with all my might to get free, and I think I'm gaining. If you can keep up that struggle about three minutes longer, I'll manage to get out of this and after that we'll make short work of Isabel Benton."

And he was working with all his might to free himself.

Never before in his life had he been helpless while a woman did the fighting. There was a humorous side to the situation, and he could have smiled while he strained at the cords, if only less had depended upon his exertions; but he did not feel that he could even afford to waste the strength consumed in a smile, considering the desperate effort he was putting forth.

He could hear them panting for breath as they struggled nearer to him, and he thought that it must be a wonderful kind of a combat to observe—this fight between two beautiful women—if only he could have raised his head so that he could see it.

And then, suddenly, something snapped.

At first he did not know what it was, and then he noticed that he could move his feet.

The two women in their struggle had broken the framework short off from the foot of the bed upon which he was lying, and in doing so had freed the cords which held his ankles bound to the posts.

And so, his feet being free, he could turn—he could bring into use a score more of his muscles than were available before.

"Courage, Cora," he called. "I'll be with you now in half a minute."

With a mighty effort he brought his legs up into the air and threw the weight of his body as well as what strength he could exert against the cord which held his right wrist.

It could not stand the strain and it snapped.

With his right hand free the rest was but a matter of a moment.

He caught the rope across his throat, and tore it away now as if it were a spider's web, and he burst the rope that held his left wrist almost with the same motion.

"Now, Cora!" he cried out; and with a bound he leaped from the bed to the floor.

He was not an instant too soon.

The maid, whom Cora had knocked down after working herself free from her own bonds, and whom she had struck with a vase from the center table, had recovered. She had staggered to her feet, and was already approaching the combatants when Nick reached the floor.

In another instant she would have been upon them, and Cora would have been pulled to the floor, helpless.

But she discovered the detective even as he leaped toward her, and turned.

"With that dreaded personage free and advancing toward her, she had but one thought, and that was to make good her escape."

With a shriek of dismay, she turned toward the door and dashed through it, and on out through the other room into the hallway, and away.

Then, suddenly, when Isabel Benton saw that Nick Carter was free, she ceased struggling.

In that instant she permitted her whole form to relax, as if she had fainted, and so she slipped through Cora's arms to the floor.

Nick started toward her, suspecting her intention, but he was too late.

She raised one hand, and with a quick motion tore an ear drop from one of her ears, and did it so quickly and so fiercely that it tore through the lobe of the ear, bringing the flesh and blood with it.

And that bulb, which had formed an ear drop, proved to be of glass.

One motion of her arm placed it between her teeth, and she crushed it there.

Her eyes were fixed upon Nick Carter when she did this, and there was a gleam of triumph in them as she felt the glass crumble between her teeth. The next instant, she had fallen back upon the floor, dead.

That bulb had been filled with cyanide of potash, the very poison with which she had threatened Nick and Cora—and it had been prepared and was worn for just such an emergency as had happened.

* * * * *

There is very little more to tell you, my reader.

The maid was captured, and suffered imprisonment for life, as an accomplice in the murder of Reginald Danton.

Mrs. Danton did not survive the shock of her son's death, and she soon followed him; and the father, when Mercedes was returned to him, retired from business and sailed for Europe with his daughter, where Doctor Pollock soon followed them.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 72, out January 24th, will contain "A Princess of Hades; or, The Reappearance of Dazaar, the Fiend." The title of this story will tell readers of recent issues of NICK CARTER STORIES enough to make them mighty anxious to read it, for the Dazaar stories proved to be wonderfully popular with our readers. You will find out how it was that Dazaar was enabled to reappear after having been buried, to all appearances. The mysterious power that she exercised over Buck Granger will partly explain this, but you will have to read the story to the end to understand it. And you will be sure to do this, for, once having started it, you will find it impossible to stop till you have read the last word.

\$10,000 REWARD;

Or, Steve Manley in a New Role.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

\$10,000 REWARD!

The following munificent offer appeared as a display advertisement in all the Pennville daily newspapers of September 28th, the day following the alleged theft:

"\$10,000 REWARD!

"For the return of trunk, with contents intact, which was stolen from Damon's express wagon on the evening of September 27th. Trunk marked 'Wm. Gleason.' If returned within five days, the above reward will be paid, and no questions asked. Address William Gleason, Pennville, Pa."

Surely the contents of this trunk must have had some extraordinary value, to have occasioned so munificent an offer.

At about nine o'clock on the morning of the same day the man who made this offer was seated in private conference with the chief of detectives in the latter's office at police headquarters.

He was an attractive gentleman of forty, and a man whose wealth had lately been materially increased by the sudden death of his father, Peter Gleason, the glass manufacturer.

William Gleason himself was a prominent Pennville broker, a popular society man, with a wife and two children, and a magnificent residence in Allegheny.

Chief O'Mara laid down the paper containing the advertisement, to which his attention had just been called, and turned his inquiring eyes upon those of his visitor.

"What do you know about this theft, Mr. Gleason?" he asked gravely.

"I can inform you in a nutshell," replied Gleason. "My wife and two daughters returned yesterday from Glenhaven, which is the name of my summer residence, some twelve miles out from the city."

"I know the place," nodded Chief O'Mara.

"They arrived in Pennville about eight o'clock in the evening, and were at once driven to my home in Allegheny. The checks for their baggage, consisting of five trunks, among which was my own, were delivered to the driver of one of Damon's express teams, with instructions to bring the trunks to my house. The driver received the five trunks from the station baggage room, and they were placed in his wagon. On arriving at my house in Allegheny one of the trunks was missing, and the driver claims that it was stolen from the wagon during the trip."

"Do you know the driver's name?"

"It is James Foley."

"Did he make any stops from the station to your house?"

"He says he did not."

"Who made the arrangements for the transportation of the trunks?"

"They were in charge of my valet, Paul Casson. He saw them placed on Foley's wagon, and saw the expressman drive off with them."

"Were you then at the station, Mr. Gleason?"

"I was not, sir. I arrived here from Philadelphia an hour later."

"Were there any arrangements made with this particular express company prior to the arrival of the train?"

"None, sir."

"And you say your valet had entire charge of the baggage?"

"Of the trunks, yes."

"How long has he been in your employ?"

"Two years."

"You trust him?"

"Thoroughly!" exclaimed Gleason. "I see no reason why you should ask such a question, Chief O'Mara. The driver himself admits that the five trunks were put upon his wagon at the station, and that only four were found there when he arrived at my house. One of these, and by far the most valuable, was stolen from his wagon during the drive."

"Was it an open wagon?"

"It was covered last night because of the rain. It was a common express wagon."

"Ordinarily," said Chief O'Mara, "it would not be easy to steal a trunk out of a covered wagon moving through the city streets. You say that Foley made no stops between the station and your house?"

"That is what Foley says, not what I say," corrected Gleason, with a slight frown. "Moreover, the circumstances were not quite ordinary. The driver wore a rubber coat and hat, the latter having a flap or cape behind, to shed the rain. This may have had a tendency to prevent his hearing sounds made at the back of his wagon, or which might have been drowned by the noise of the wheels."

"Ah. I see!"

"At all events, Chief O'Mara, when he arrived at my house and was about to deliver the trunk, it was found that the tailboard of the wagon had been dropped on the way there, and that one of the trunks was missing."

"Was the wagon left standing unattended in front of your residence for any length of time?"

"Not a moment, sir!" exclaimed Gleason quickly. "My valet already had reached the house, and was in the hall when the expressman arrived. He at once opened the front door and commanded him to bring the trunks into the house. He stood on the front steps while this was being done."

"You think it is improbable, then, that the trunk was stolen after the wagon stopped at your residence?"

"Impossible, sir! Moreover, the driver instantly discovered the theft on raising the leather flap at the back of the wagon."

"What did he then do?"

"What could he do? He delivered the other four trunks, then drove back in search of the one missing. Of course, he did not find it. On arriving home, an hour later, I was informed of my serious loss, and I at once notified the local police, and sent that reward advertisement to the newspapers for this morning's editions."

Chief O'Mara glanced again at the paper he had laid aside. His brow was clouded, and a curious light glowed in his grave eyes.

"You have not told me the whole story, Mr. Gleason," he presently said, quite curtly.

"Why do you infer that?" replied Gleason, with a slight start of surprise.

"Because there is more of a mystery here than the mere stealing of a trunk from an express wagon."

"Do you think so, Chief O'Mara?"

"I know so, sir! Why have you offered this large reward?"

"Because I am very anxious to recover the trunk."

"Were its contents worth ten thousand dollars?"

"Not the intrinsic value of its contents, sir. But the trunk contains one document, Chief O'Mara, the loss of which may involve more than fifty times ten thousand dollars."

"What document?"

"The last will and testament of my late father, Peter Gleason, by which I am the residuary legatee of an estate estimated at nearly half a million dollars."

"That puts a very different complexion on the matter!" exclaimed Chief O'Mara quickly. "Is there any copy of this will?"

"None, sir."

"And if it was lost?"

"If it is lost, I possibly may lose all except that portion of the property which legally would have come to me had my father died intestate. Despite that its provisions are known to my lawyer, my brother, and myself, the loss of this will occasion a suit at law which I may not be able to successfully contest."

"A suit instigated by whom?"

"By my brother, John Gleason."

"Does he not inherit under this will?"

"His legacy amounts to only a few thousand dollars."

"Then, your father bequeathed you the bulk of his large property, did he?"

"He did, sir; and I presume that my brother resents this."

"You say that you presume it," rejoined Chief O'Mara. "Don't you positively know it?"

"No, sir, I do not. If John Gleason feels sore over being cut off in this way, he has been very careful to conceal his feelings. That is the one reason why I have approached this matter rather delicately; I do not wish to wrong my brother by unjust suspicions."

"Yet, you fear that he may have had a hand in this theft?"

"I confess that I am not without misgivings, yet I have not the slightest proof of it."

"The significance of circumstantial evidence is sometimes lost sight of by those unfamiliar with detective work," observed Chief O'Mara. "Please give me the precise facts bearing on the case, Mr. Gleason."

Gleason drew his chair a little nearer.

"I can do so quite briefly," he replied. "My father died ten days ago, quite suddenly. He was a widower, and left but two direct heirs, my brother and myself."

"Is your brother the elder?"

"Yes, sir," nodded Gleason. "A few days after my father's death I was informed by his attorney, Lawyer Beck, that my father had made a will almost entirely in my favor, and had left my brother only about ten thousand dollars."

"Do you know any reason for this?"

"Only that my father has always opposed my brother's way of living, and his dissolute habits," explained Gleason gravely. "John has always been fast, what is commonly called a sport, and he has not a very enviable reputation."

"Is this brother of yours the John Gleason who is known as a horse racer and general gambler?" inquired the chief, with a slight change of countenance.

"Yes, sir," said William Gleason, acknowledging the relationship with the simplicity of a man not at all proud of it.

Chief O'Mara bowed.

"I can understand why your father may not have wished his honestly earned money devoted to such pursuits," he quietly observed. "In some respects, John Gleason is a pretty tough ticket, and I say it to you with all the consideration in the world."

"I appreciate your qualification of the remark," said Gleason gravely. "I am quite aware that my brother John is not a relative to be proud of, yet I am averse to suspecting him unjustly."

"Please state the precise circumstances under which the will happened to be in the stolen trunk, Mr. Gleason. Possibly there may be some clew to work from."

"I hope so, I am sure."

"It looks very much to me as if there had been a put-up job on that particular trunk. State the circumstances, please."

"They are these," rejoined Gleason readily: "Until yesterday my wife and family have been living at Glenhaven, where we spend each summer."

"Have you been in the habit of going out there each night?"

"Oh, yes, invariably. On Saturday last I called upon Lawyer Beck and requested the privilege of taking the will to Glenhaven with me, for the purpose of showing it to my brother, who had agreed to come from Philadelphia to see it and to pass Sunday with me."

"Did John Gleason express a desire that you would do this?"

"He wrote me only that he would like to see the will, and that Sunday was the only day he conveniently could leave Philadelphia at just this time. Accordingly, I made the proposition mentioned."

"That he should come to Glenhaven on Sunday?"

"Precisely."

"Did he do so?"

"He did, and examined the will."

"What did he say about it?"

"He expressed his disappointment, but otherwise evinced no feeling. We have always been on a friendly footing, despite that I deplore his evil habits."

"When did he leave Glenhaven?"

"Early Monday morning."

"Did he return to Philadelphia?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"I am very sure of it, sir, for I accompanied him."

"With any special object?"

"No, no special object, in so far as he was concerned. I had important personal business calling me to Philadelphia, so I made the journey with him."

"At his suggestion, or your own?"

"At my own, sir."

"What about the will?"

"It was owing to this journey that the will found its way into my trunk at Glenhaven," Gleason went on to explain. "I did not wish to carry the document during the several days I expected to be absent, nor did it occur to

me that I might safely have mailed it back to the attorney."

"What did you do with it?"

"I intrusted it to the care of my valet, instructing him to look after it, and to bring it with him to Allegheny when he came with my family the following Wednesday. That was yesterday."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Gleason," gravely interposed Chief O'Mara, "were you not averse to having the will on your person chiefly because of the fact that you were to make this journey with your brother?"

"Well, yes; that was one reason why I confided it to the care of Paul Casson," Gleason gravely admitted.

"Did Casson remain at Glenhaven?"

"Yes, sir; he remained to aid my wife and her maids in packing the trunks, and closing the place for the season."

"How many maids has your wife?"

"Two, sir."

"Did your wife and the two maids know about the will?"

"I informed my wife about it, but I am not certain as to the maids."

"How about your daughters?"

"Both of them are children under ten, and I think—"

"If they are children of that age," interposed Chief O'Mara, "it does not matter. When did you give the will to your valet?"

"Before leaving Glenhaven, Monday morning."

"And to-day is Thursday. Did you give Casson your instructions at the same time you gave him the will?"

"No, I did not; I already had told him what I wished him to do."

"When did you tell him?"

"The night before, Sunday evening," said Gleason. "But he did not quite follow my instructions, though he now claims to have misunderstood them."

"Ah, that is rather odd! Tell me just what you said to him about the will."

"I told him that it was an important document, also why I did not wish to carry it with me to Philadelphia. I then locked it in my desk at Glenhaven and gave him the key, telling him to take the will from the desk before leaving yesterday, and to bring it with him when he accompanied my family to Allegheny."

"Those instructions should have been plain," said Chief O'Mara shortly. "In what way did he misunderstand them?"

"His mistake was natural enough, perhaps, and I am not inclined to suspect him," replied Gleason. "My intention was that he should place the will in his pocket, and to care for it until he could return it to me last evening. Instead of doing that, he placed it with some few other papers of less importance in a secret compartment of my trunk, the packing of which he always looks after."

"And does he now state that he understood that he was to bring it in that way?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you believe him to be honest in the matter?"

"I never before have had reason to doubt his honesty," replied Gleason. "I may not have been perfectly explicit in giving him my instructions, Chief O'Mara, and I really think that Paul Casson did what he understood me to have commanded. No doubt, he thought the secret compartment of my trunk would be fully as safe as his own pocket."

"Don't it strike you as rather peculiar that this particular trunk should have been stolen?"

"Foley states that it was the last one to be put on his wagon, and was nearest the tailboard. I presume that thieves naturally would have taken the one easiest to secure."

"Yes, no doubt," exclaimed Chief O'Mara dryly. "Did Casson leave Glenhaven for any length of time after receiving your instructions as to the will?"

"Not until yesterday, when he accompanied my wife and family to Allegheny."

"Why didn't you leave the will in the care of your wife?" asked Chief O'Mara, with a rather curious look in his searching eyes.

"Because my wife is very nervously inclined, and I did not care to impose the charge upon her," Gleason gravely explained. "As a matter of fact, I did not seriously apprehend the loss of the document, and I believed that my valet would take quite as good care of it as I should have done. It was not the first time I had trusted him in a like manner, and I had perfect faith in the young man's honesty. As, indeed, I now have."

"How old is Casson?"

"About twenty-five."

"And has been in your employ about two years?"

"Rather longer than that, sir. He is a well-educated Frenchman, and came with me from Paris when I returned from abroad two years ago last May."

"Was he in your employ during the time you were in France?"

"Yes; for nearly three months."

"Did he come to you well recommended?"

"Decidedly so?"

Chief O'Mara consulted his watch.

"And Casson now states that the will was in the private compartment of the stolen trunk, does he?" demanded the chief.

"Yes, sir, he does. He is very emphatic in that statement."

Chief O'Mara closed his watch with a snap.

"It is now ten o'clock, Mr. Gleason," he said, with a snap to his words, also. "Return here at two this afternoon. I then will tell you in what way your stolen trunk may be recovered."

CHAPTER II.

PLANNING A COUNTERGAME.

It took Chief O'Mara until noon only to verify to his own satisfaction a few of the statements made by William Gleason; and the fact that he gave the investigation his personal attention indicates that he suspected the case to be more than an ordinary theft, and one requiring skillful handling.

An interview with Lawyer Beck established the fact that Gleason had called for the will, as stated, and that its loss was a serious matter.

"There is no duplicate copy of the will," explained the lawyer, "and, although I know its provisions, if John Gleason, who is quite capable of any sort of knavery, should contest the matter in the courts, he very possibly could succeed in acquiring a legal if not a moral right to one-half of the Gleason estate."

"As a matter of fact, then, John Gleason is the only

person who would profit by the loss of the will, is he not?" inquired Chief O'Mara.

"Precisely," replied the attorney: "If the will is not recovered, and it cannot be proved that he is responsible for its loss, the matter assumes a very serious aspect."

"I fully believe that he is at the bottom of the job," said Chief O'Mara decisively.

"So do I, as far as that goes," rejoined the lawyer. "Yet, from what I hear from Gleason, he appears to have covered his tracks very completely."

"Then it remains for me to uncover them!" exclaimed the chief of detectives. "I doubt very much if he can get the best of me at the finish."

Yet, an interview with Foley, the expressman, did not give any definite clew tending to incriminate John Gleason.

Foley easily proved that he was at the railway station on other business when the train arrived with the Gleason family and baggage, and that Casson only incidentally had engaged him to take the several trunks to Allegheny.

He stated that he had received the checks for the trunks from the valet, and that Casson personally had seen them placed on the express wagon. Foley then had driven from the station, and had crossed the Ninth Street bridge, proceeding without a stop to Gleason's house, in Allegheny. In the course of this drive, the trunk had mysteriously disappeared, and, as Foley claimed, utterly without his knowledge.

The evening was known to have been dark and rainy, with considerable fog, and the only explanation Foley could offer was that advantage had been taken of these conditions and the trunk stolen during the trip.

Beyond this, he denied any knowledge of the affair, and the Damon Express Company, by which he was employed, testified to his general good character, and volunteered to defray the entire expense of the police investigation.

At noon, Chief O'Mara returned to his office at headquarters, with a plan of operation already matured in his mind.

His first step was to call Steve Manley into his office, and give him a general outline of the mysterious case.

"Now, Steve," he added, in conclusion, "I will tell you what I suspect, and what I want you to do."

Knowing that a very important bit of work was about to devolve upon him, Steve was all attention.

"To begin with," explained the chief, "I believe that John Gleason is at the bottom of this job, and that he now knows where the trunk is, or, at least, who has it. But Gleason is said to have been in Philadelphia since Monday, when his brother gave the will to the valet, and if he really is responsible for the theft, it must have been done with the help of others."

"Mebbe the valet had a hand in it, sir," suggested Steve.

"The valet is the very party I suspect," nodded Chief O'Mara. "He received his instructions from William Gleason on Sunday evening, and it is possible that before Monday morning John Gleason entered into some agreement with the valet by which this scheme could be worked."

"There was time enough for it, sir."

"Decidedly so, in case the valet could be bribed."

"Mebbe the expressman was in the job, too, sir."

"If so, I think we shall run him down at the finish," said Chief O'Mara. "At present, however, I shall let

him alone and look after the chief parties to the affair. If there was any design in which Casson and John Gleason were confederates, I first wish to discover what it was and how it was executed. I suspect that John Gleason will come here from Philadelphia as soon as he safely can admit being informed of the theft, and that he then will attempt to secure the will from the party now in possession of it."

"You think he has planned to get it without any one getting on to it?"

"That is it precisely."

"Wouldn't it be a good scheme to shadow the valet, sir, and see if he and John Gleason have any meeting?" suggested Steve.

"That is just what I want you to do," said Chief O'Mara; "but it must be done very shrewdly. John Gleason still is friendly with his brother, and he no doubt is working that point with some secret design in view. I wish to discover what his object is, and just what he has been doing. He no doubt will visit his brother's house, if he comes on here, and by watching him and the valet we may discover where the trunk is located. I want you to undertake this part of the work, and I have a plan by which I think we may succeed in solving the mystery."

"What's the plan, Chief O'Mara?"

"Do you think you could make yourself up as a girl?"

"As a girl?" exclaimed Steve, laughing. "I can do that dead easy, sir."

"You would look enough like one, but how about your actions? Could you play such a part?"

"I can do it away up to the top notch, Chief O'Mara!" cried Steve eagerly. "Any guy ought to be able to act the way a girl does. What's the whole game, sir?"

"I will tell you presently. Here comes Mr. Gleason, now."

The tall figure of William Gleason had at that moment appeared on the threshold, and Chief O'Mara quickly signified for him to enter and take a chair.

"I have just received a telegram from my brother in Philadelphia," he said, as he took the seat indicated.

"Ah, that is quite significant!" exclaimed the chief.

"What does he say?"

"Only that he sees by the papers that I have met with quite a serious loss, and he expresses his regret."

"Very kind in him!" laughed the chief.

He at once suspected that Gleason had sent this message solely to show that he still was in Philadelphia, and not in Pennville, where he might have had a hand in the robbery the previous evening.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Gleason," he added, "you do not believe that your brother had a part in this theft, do you?"

"I do not see how he could have had, sir, despite that he is the one who might profit by it," replied the broker. "John went to Philadelphia with me Monday, and I am sure he has not been here since."

"Do you wish me to clear up this case for you and recover your father's will?" demanded the chief, quite curtly.

"Most assuredly I do!"

"I will undertake it on one condition."

"What is the condition, sir?"

"That you will follow my instructions to the very letter."

"I will do that, I promise you."

"In the first place, then, you are to say nothing about the work I am doing except to your wife. It will be necessary that you confide in her, and I presume you can rely upon her silence and discretion?"

"Beyond a doubt, sir."

"You say that she employs two maids?"

"Yes."

"What are their duties?"

"One is a chambermaid, chiefly. The other is my wife's waiting maid."

"Did either of them have a hand in packing the trunks brought from Glenhaven?"

"Only my wife's maid assisted in that work."

"Then your wife must discharge her to-day, Mr. Gleason, and advertise for a girl to take her place."

"But I feel sure that this girl is innocent of any——"

"Stop right there, Mr. Gleason!" exclaimed Chief O'Mara. "You are to do what I command in this affair, or I will throw up the case at once."

"Pardon me!" said Gleason quickly. "I will do so, I assure you. I had in mind only the welfare of the girl."

"You had better keep in mind the fact that you have a fortune at stake. As for the girl, you can repair her interests later, if you so desire. I want you to discharge the girl to-day, and advertise for another."

"It shall be done, sir."

"In response to your advertisement, Mr. Gleason," continued Chief O'Mara, "this young detective, in the attire of a girl, will apply at your house for the position."

"As waiting maid to my wife!" exclaimed Gleason, staring blankly at Steve.

"Precisely, sir."

"Hully gee!" thought Steve, with a grin on his boyish face. "But here is a pudding!"

"But my wife can hardly avail herself of a boy's service in that capacity!" cried Gleason, quite aghast.

"You must explain the situation to her, and she must adapt herself to it," persisted Chief O'Mara. "She can dispense with a maid for a week or two, surely, yet at the same time have it appear that she is employing one."

"Why, yes, she can do that."

"Well, that is all I require of her."

"Did you say that he would be dressed as a girl when he applied for the situation?" asked Gleason, again bestowing a curious glance upon Steve's smiling face.

"Certainly he will be dressed as a girl."

"Does he know anything about a maid's duties?"

"Your wife must overlook any failings in that respect. In a word, Mr. Gleason, I wish to place him in your house for a special purpose, and you must plan for it with your wife, and in accordance with these instructions. The question is, are you willing to do so?"

"I have already said so, Chief O'Mara."

"Very good, then! See to it that the maid is discharged to-day, and that the girl who calls to-morrow in response to your advertisement is employed to take her place."

"You mean the boy who calls!"

"No, I mean the girl who calls," said Chief O'Mara, quite sharply. "At all events, whether the sex is one or the other, the party who calls must be received as a girl. And, take heed, Mr. Gleason, that neither you nor your wife betray any of the facts. One-half of your inheritance may depend upon your discretion."

"I will see that your instructions are followed, sir," said Gleason quickly. "But there may be other applicants for the situation, sir, and I may not recognize this boy in a girl's attire."

"Mebbe all girls look alike to him, chief," put in Steve, by way of comment.

But Chief O'Mara's grave countenance did not relax.

"He will bring a letter of introduction, Mr. Gleason, signed by one Mrs. Parmenter."

"Ah, that will easily identify him. I will instruct my wife accordingly."

"That is all, then," bowed Chief O'Mara. "You may expect him about noon to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

At precisely noon on the following day, Steve Manley presented himself at the Gleason residence in Allegheny. But Chief O'Mara himself would scarce have recognized him.

Steve had spent the entire previous afternoon in preparing for the new rôle he was expected to play, and his make-up was perfect. A more attractive young lady never stood in leather.

Yet Steve had been clever enough not to overdo the part. He was plainly dressed in a blue serge, with a neatly fitting jacket to match; and his fresh, round countenance was set off to great advantage by a curly, blond wig. The rest of his wardrobe had been selected with equally good taste, and left in a small trunk at his lodgings.

As it happened, Paul Casson answered Steve's ring at the door, and the valet at once suspected the mission of the young and pretty girl he saw, two others already having called in response to the advertisement.

That Paul Casson was quickly struck by the attractions of this one, and felt a hope that she might be more successful, was betrayed in his clean-cut, expressive, French face.

And Steve was not slow to notice this.

"Is the lady of the house at home?" he asked, with an innocent smile and very musical voice.

"Yes, miss, she is," smiled Casson, speaking with a slight French accent. "Who shall I say wishes to see her?"

"One of the maids of the late Mrs. Parmenter, who died of the grip a week ago Tuesday," said Steve glibly.

"Oh, you're an applicant for the situation of maid to Mrs. Gleason!" exclaimed Casson, with a great display of friendly interest.

And he signed for Steve to enter.

"Yes, sir, I am looking for the job," said Steve, wiping his lips with an affected air, and with a handkerchief so small that he almost lost it in the operation.

"I hope she'll engage you," whispered Casson, with a wink.

Steve saw that he had made an impression, and was resolved to profit by it. He returned the wink, and whispered back:

"So do I, sir, if you're in service here."

"I am," nodded Casson. "I am Gleason's valet."

"Is the mistress the kind I'm likely to make a hit with?" asked Steve.

"Have you recommendations?"

"Sure I have. From the lady I last worked for."

"Then I think you'll get the place. Wait here, and I'll inform her."

Casson was right in his predictions, but he did not dream how little the recommendation had to do with Mrs. Gleason's decision. Steve was very quickly accepted to fill the position, and that afternoon he took up his abode in the Gleason residence and had his trunk brought to the house.

He found Mrs. Gleason a very pleasant lady, as willing as her husband to aid him in the work he had on hand, and before night Steve found himself quite at home in the house, and had made friends with one and all of its inmates.

As he saw considerable of Paul Casson, whom he soon set down to be a very clever and crafty fellow, Steve took good care to further encourage the Frenchman's sly attentions, and before night he had him well in hand in that respect.

With Casson it was almost a case of love at first sight, though this may not have been of the most commendable character.

The delicate work Steve had on hand, however, took shape even sooner than he expected; for that very afternoon one of the predictions of Chief O'Mara was verified.

Jack Gleason, despite his statement that he could not conveniently leave Philadelphia just then, suddenly showed up in Pennville. He wore a disguise, however, in approaching the first place he visited. This was the saloon of one Jim Kennedy, on Bluff Street, and was known to be one of the most dangerous dives in the whole city.

Kennedy himself was an ex-convict and pugilist, and a man who would shrink from no desperate venture in which there was money.

He was talking at the bar with Ike Fenton, another of the same sort, when Jack Gleason entered; but neither recognized him, though these were the men he had called to see.

He walked straight through the saloon, however, for there were other occupants, and entered a private back room.

"Tell Kennedy and the man he is talking with that I want to speak to them," he said to the waiter who followed him into the room to take his order.

While waiting, Gleason closed the door and removed the heavy false beard he was wearing and tossed it carelessly upon the table. He was a large man, with broad shoulders and an imposing figure, and was quite flashily dressed. His features would have been attractive but for the signs of dissipation and a certain sinister expression in his dark eyes.

"There's a party in the back room wants you two," said the waiter, in a low tone, at Kennedy's elbow.

"Wants us?"

"That's what he said."

"Did you know him?"

"He was new to me."

"Mebbe it's Jack Gleason," said Fenton, in an undertone.

"Sure! I'd ought to have thought of him," nodded Kennedy, leading the way to the room.

Gleason met them with a smile, and quickly extended his hand.

"Congratulations, Jim!" he exclaimed, in tones of evi-

dent satisfaction. "You did the job finely. I owe you both my thanks, and I'll make good according to agreement as soon as the document is in my hands."

Kennedy flashed a quick look at Ike Fenton, and both gave vent to a rather curious laugh.

"If you don't make good until you get the document, Jack, it's like to be many a day!" cried Kennedy, as he dropped Gleason's hand.

The latter drew back, with a quick frown.

"What do you mean by that, Jim?" cried Gleason sharply, with manifest uneasiness.

"Just what I say."

"Not that you have lost the trunk?"

"No, we've not lost it."

"Cease your fooling, then!" Gleason cried, quite angrily. "With a fortune at stake, I am not in a mood for it. Where is the trunk?"

"We don't know."

"Don't know?"

"I should say not! We have never seen it."

An oath broke from Gleason's lips as he strode suddenly forward, with his face grown pale and threatening, and laid a heavy hand on Kennedy's shoulder.

"See here," he cried sternly, "don't try playing any of your infernal games on me. I'll not stand for treachery. I made you an offer for this job, and I am ready to make good the moment it's done. But I'll not stand for any underhanded business."

"What do you think?" growled Fenton sharply. "That we have got the trunk?"

"Of course you have it!" cried Gleason. "Who else can have it? You're going back on me, that's plain enough; and you mean to claim the reward offered by my brother."

"You—"

"Easy, Ike!" interposed Kennedy, quickly checking the man's sudden display of anger. "Jack's square enough, and it looks mightily as if we were up to the game he suspects, seeing that there'd be more in it for us than he offered. But you're wrong, Jack Gleason, all the same."

Gleason fell back a step, and looked at them with frowning eyes.

"You don't mean that you haven't got the trunk?" he again demanded.

"That's just what I mean, Jack," said Kennedy grimly. "And I'm sorry enough to say it."

"But the trunk was certainly stolen."

"That's true enough. But we had no hand in it."

"Good God! You don't mean that some other parties got it?" cried Gleason, more pale and dismayed than ever.

"That's just about the size of it," said Kennedy. "Sit down and I'll tell you about it."

It was plain enough that Jack Gleason did not believe these assertions, yet he dropped heavily into a chair by the table and waited for Kennedy's explanation.

"We started the job just as you planned with Fenton in Philadelphia," said Kennedy, seating himself on the edge of the table. "Fenton came to me and told me the whole scheme, and what there would be in it for us, and we were ready enough to do it."

"Did you see Foley?"

"Sure, I saw Foley."

"Did he agree to do his part?"

"Yes, and he did it, so far as I know," Kennedy rejoined, "He was at the station when the trunks came and met the valet just as the two of you had planned it at Glenhaven. There was no trouble about that part of the job, and Foley got the trunks all right. We saw him when he took 'em!"

"Yes, and I heard the whole talk between him and the valet," put in Fenton. "It was on the dead level."

"Then Foley started for the Ninth Street bridge, as agreed," continued Kennedy; "and we two drove well ahead of him, so as to be there to lift the trunk at the right time. Foley was to drive slow on the bridge, so as to give us a chance to slip the trunk out of his wagon."

"Then, how in thunder did the scheme miscarry?" cried Gleason.

"I can only tell you what we did," Kennedy sharply retorted. "It was darker on the Allegheny end of the bridge, so we drove nearly across, thinking there would be the safest place for us to do the work. We got there nearly five minutes ahead of Foley, and he walked his horse the whole length of the bridge."

"Well?"

"When he came opposite where we had hauled up, we slipped in behind the wagon to lift the trunk and make off with it. It would have been dead easy to have got away with it, for 'twas dark and foggy, and we wouldn't have been seen more than ten yards away. But the trunk was not on the team, and that's why we didn't get it."

"You don't mean that it already had been stolen?"

"That's just what I mean," said Kennedy decisively. "The tailboard of the wagon was down and the trunk gone."

"And Foley knew nothing about it?"

"Not the first thing."

"Impossible!"

"That's what he says, anyway!" Fenton bluntly interposed. "I have seen him and had a talk with him. He says he drove slow, not knowing what part of the bridge we were on, and that the trunk was lifted without his knowing it. That's just how the thing stands, and you can cuss and swear about it as much as you like. We would have done our part, only the trunk was gone, and you know as well as we do who swiped it."

"And if you're looking for treachery," added Kennedy, with a significant nod, "you had better look for it in the duffer you laid the plan with at Glenhaven."

"Casson?"

"Yes, if that's his name."

"I cannot believe that he went back on me," cried Gleason angrily.

"He's a blamed sight more likely to have done it than either of us," retorted Fenton, with a resentful growl.

"But he did not leave Glenhaven until he came up here with the family."

"I don't care if he didn't. He's the party you had better look after. If any of the fly gang about town had done the job, they'd have been after the reward offered long before this time."

"You may be right in that," admitted Gleason, struck by the idea.

"We have been giving it to you straight, Jack," added Kennedy. "And I think as Foley does, that this Casson has in some way done the whole of us."

"If he has, I'll ring the frog-eating Frenchman's neck!"

cried Gleason, starting quickly to his feet. "Will you two help me out, if I find that I need your aid?"

"If you find that he has the trunk," replied Kennedy, "you still can count on us as being on the job for the price offered. I'm a bit sore myself at being done in this way."

"You have not seen Casson?"

"We didn't think it safe to take the chance."

"And we couldn't let you know about it," added Fenton, "because we didn't have your address in Philadelphia."

"I see! I see!" muttered Gleason, with an ugly look settled on his dark face. "You two wait till I have seen him, and then I'll let you hear from me. I begin to think you're right, and that he has been double-dealing."

"If he has, you bring him down here, Jack, and we'll soon get the truth out of him," growled Kennedy. "When will you see him?"

"This very evening," said Gleason sharply. "I'll go to my brother's house at once. Let the matter rest until you hear from me; and then—"

He did not finish his words, but the expression on his white face spoke louder, even; and, having carefully readjusted the disguise he had removed, he hurried from the saloon and started for Gleason's residence in Allegheny.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A LITTLE TOO PROMPT.

By MAX ADELER.

My neighbor Partridge made an arrangement with Judge Pitman that whenever the latter heard Partridge spring his watchman's rattle, the judge should understand that burglars were in Partridge's house, and he should come over to help drive them off. One night, shortly afterward, Partridge had been up to the city, and he came home in the late train, reaching his house after midnight. To his vexation he found that the hired girl had forgotten about him and locked the front door. After ringing the doorbell furiously for half an hour without waking anybody, he went around to the yard, and procuring a crowbar from the shed, he pried open a window shutter. He was just about to raise the window, when Mrs. Partridge, aroused by the noise, came to the second-story window and saw a burglar engaged in entering the house. She flew to the front window and sprang the rattle. Partridge's first impulse was to run around and call to his wife and explain. But he knew that he couldn't make her hear while the rattle was going, so he thought he would go inside and calm her fears. He pushed up the sash, and climbed up on the sill. Just as he got his body halfway in, the catch on the window slipped, and the heavy sash came down and held him there, so that he could neither get in nor out. While he was struggling to release himself, the judge arrived with his shotgun and a lantern, and a dog and a hired man. As soon as the judge saw the burglar in the window he banged away with his gun, and poured both barrels at the scoundrel. The gun scattered a good deal, and the judge was nervous, so only about a hundred shot struck Partridge. And then the judge turned the dog on, and let him take a few hearty bites, while Mrs. Partridge, seeing that the burglar was helpless, came down and snatched out a handful or two of his hair, and then thumped him with the crumb brush. At last the hired man seized the burglar by the legs and drew him out, and then,

as the judge was about to pound him with the butt of his gun, he shrieked that his name was Partridge, and that it was all a mistake. The judge examined his features, and found that it was indeed Partridge. Then he said:—

"By George, old fellow, I'm most awful sorry! You know I thought you were a——"

"Oh! no matter what you thought, you infernal old idiot; it's enough for me to know that what you didn't shoot out of my leg that diabolical dog of yours bit out!"

"Your wife sprung the rattle and so I——"

"Oh, I'll fix her! Lifted pretty nearly all the hair out of my head, and brained me with a club. Did it on purpose, I know mighty well! A divorce is what I'll get for her! And the very first thing I'll do in the morning will be to have you arrested for murder. I'm going to set out here on the fence, and go to an alderman's as soon as daylight dawns."

Then the judge and Mrs. Partridge tried to soothe him, but he refused to be comforted; and when the judge went home Partridge sat on the ash barrel and meditated revenge, while Mrs. Partridge stood at the window in her nightgown and cried. But he went in at breakfast time, and by the time he was able to lay aside his crutches he was disposed to take a less gloomy view of the tragedy. His present arrangement with Pitman, however, is that when the judge hears an alarm he is to stay at home and lock his dog up somewhere.

SLAVERY ALONG THE AMAZON.

The Madre de Dios is a majestic waterway, some 400 yards wide, at Puerto Alanza. Later on it joins another river to become the Beni. Farther down again it flows into the Marañon, and finally—more than 1,000 miles below Alanza—is merged into the mighty Amazon.

On the banks of the Amazon there are large towns boasting of a so-called civilization, but in the remote reaches of the affluents and subaffluents, and in the great forest tracts along these spacious waterways, force and nature reign supreme. Human, animal, and plant life battle hard for existence.

In this vast and little-known region law and order are not codified. They are merely the product of self-defense. If an evildoer be caught, retribution is swift and terrible. And slaves—the aboriginal forest savages—are bought and sold freely. The Madre de Dios market price of a man is \$300, a woman \$200, and a child \$50, although for good men used to collecting cauchó (low-grade wild rubber) much higher prices prevail.

It must be confessed, that these slaves are not, as a rule, unhappy. Instead of wandering wild about the woods, they are brought into the rubber camps, given some clothes and a gun, and introduced to alcohol. Then they are sent out into the forest to cut down cauchó trees and collect the rubber that flows from the trunks. It is true that, in some places, flogging and other ill treatment follow when the quantity of rubber picked is small.

MOUND BUILDERS IN IOWA.

The high bluffs of the Mississippi and Iowa Rivers were favorite dwelling places of the ancient mound builders. Louisa County, Iowa, contains many examples of their relics. Near the village of Toolesboro the most extensive examples of their work have been found. Per-

haps it was their seat of government. They surely had a form of government, with a ruling power to unite and direct large bodies of men necessary to construct the large mounds and earthworks that they left behind them.

Grouped about Toolesboro are mounds and walls, and the faint traces of what was once a great fort, which has now been almost obliterated by the plow, harrow, and spade of civilization, yet the large mound that borders the village is the largest and most extensive known to exist in Iowa. Its contents have never been disturbed.

Many of the mounds have been opened by scientific explorers, several of them from the Davenport Academy of Science, which owns the finest collection of mound builders' antiquities in the United States. The explorers were very careful to restore the mounds to their former condition after removing the relics found therein.

A WONDERFUL COLLECTION OF COINS.

The Philadelphia mint has a wonderful collection of coins. Among other curiosities it includes what is believed to be the oldest piece of metal money ever made, which was minted in Ægina about 700 B. C.

Dates on coins were unknown up to four hundred years ago. The very early coins bore designs only on one face.

Of all coins that ever existed the smallest in value was the "mite," such as the widow in the Bible dropped through the slot of the poor box. The most valuable coin in the collection described is a Chinese piece worth \$250.

Queerest of all the coins are those from Siam—irregular roundish lumps of silver, from the bigness of a walnut to that of half a buckshot.

Modern coins, though the mechanical processes for producing them have been so greatly improved, are far inferior artistically to those of ancient times.

The earliest form of money is still in use to-day in southern Asia, the islands of the Pacific Ocean, and parts of Africa, where cowrie shells are the favorite negotiable medium.

They are usually quoted at about one hundred for four cents.

ENGLISH HOLIDAYS.

There are now twenty-six days in the year recognized as legitimate occasions for holidays in most cities of England. These are in addition to the weekly half holidays observed on Wednesdays or Saturdays. An effort is being made to lessen the number of holidays and to bring these retained into more systematic order.

THE MOST FREQUENTLY MISSPELLED WORDS.

The words most frequently misspelled by educated persons are those in which the vowels "e" and "i" follow one another, of which the words "believed" and "received" are most frequent. The vowels in these words are often misplaced; in believed the "i" being put after instead of before the "e," where it ought to be, and in received the "i" being put before instead of after the "e," where its proper position is. Separate is another word frequently misspelled by educated persons substituting an "e" for an "a" after the "p;" others are "disappoint," spelled "disapoint;" "across" "accross;" and "oblige" "oblidge."

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Fur Farm Success; Bigger Next Year.

When L. M. Crawford, of Topeka, converted his 1,000-acre ranch, near Cottonwood Falls, Kansas, into a farm for the production of Astrakhan, Persian lamb, and Krimmer furs, about a year ago, few persons believed that he would make a go of the venture. But at the end of his first season he is able to report success, and with the greater knowledge he now has he expects to make a much larger financial turnover next year. On January 4 last, Crawford started with about 30 head of pure-bred Karakules, 19 of them rams, which came originally from Asia, and these were crossed with 1,100 Lincoln ewes, brought from Idaho. At the beginning of the experiment some doubted the practicability of the project; others, believing Crawford was on a wild-goose chase, pitted him.

No one in this country ever had attempted the production of these sheep for profit. But tests had proved that such a cross would give furs of value. And furriers were importing \$14,000,000 worth of such pelts from Russia every year. That was assurance enough for Crawford. With the advice and encouragement of Doctor R. K. Nabob, a breeder at the Kansas Agricultural College, he was willing to be the first man in the United States to grow these furs for commercial purposes.

This is the first year of production on the fur farm, and, barring a slight disappointment in the number of the half-blood lambs produced, it was a successful season. The fur farm has established itself. It has safely passed the experimental stage. Because of the fact that the breeding began too late last fall, only 300 lambs arrived. Crawford believes that 1,000 lambs might just as well have been reared had mating been started earlier in the season, and the rams allowed to run freely with the ewes. One hundred lambs were born dead or died soon after birth. This did not affect the value of the pelts, which were marketed in New York for \$3.50 to \$10 apiece. Equally good prices might have been received for the other 200, but Crawford desired to keep these for breeding purposes.

Twelve pure-bred Karakule lambs were reared this year. Crawford has refused a number of offers for these as breeding animals because he desires to increase his own herd. He did let two of them go to a friend in Canada for \$1,000 apiece, and he disposed of four of the half-bloods at \$100 apiece, but he is offering no others for sale. An estimate of the returns from the farm this year shows these results:

Half-blood pelts, 100 at \$5 (average).....	\$500
Twelve pure-bred Karakules at \$1,000.....	12,000
Two hundred half-bloods at \$100.....	20,000
From sale of wool.....	1,000
Total.....	\$33,500

Says Man's Ignorance Causes Crop Ruin.

The annual damage to crops by insect and mammal pests in the United States now amounts to many millions of dollars, and is steadily increasing partly as the result of the encroachments of new insect enemies and rodent pests, but mainly perhaps because of man's upthinking destruc-

tion of his natural allies which kill the crop-destroying pests. Man, instead of permitting these natural allies to keep pace with the multiplication of the pests upon which they feed, has destroyed them until their numbers are entirely inadequate to preserve the balance. It is therefore important that the farmer and stockman should everywhere seek to protect and encourage the natural foes of injurious mammals and not wantonly, or because of unfounded prejudice or misinformation, kill many animals that he regards as enemies but which are real friends.

Predacious animals and birds have an important function to perform in their capacity as natural enemies to crop-destroying insects and pests, according to Doctor A. K. Fisher, economic investigator of the biological survey, United States department of agriculture. Before man interfered with the intricate relations of wild creatures and disturbed the balance of nature, the carnivorous animals served admirably to prevent undue increase of the hordes of smaller animals that fed on herbage, seeds, fruits, and other vegetables. So perfectly was the balance regulated that a temporary increase or decrease in one direction was followed, sooner or later, by a corresponding change in another.

But, valuable as many predacious animals are in aiding to maintain the balance of nature, man is liable to look askance at every mammal or bird that ever molests his poultry, or, under exceptional conditions, seems to attack the game of the States, states Doctor Fisher. Without regard to consequences, he sets out to kill everything that resembles the particular offender. He declines to grant a mere pittance in return for a value received, and visits indiscriminate persecution on many humble and faithful workers that have helped importantly to save his harvest or orchard.

Most flesh-eating animals change their ordinary diet only under pressure of hunger. In the main, they prey upon some abundant species, which, when available, furnishes almost their entire subsistence. For example, if meadow mice were always present, the red-tailed hawk would rarely touch other food. It is when their normal food is scarce, and therefore frequently after they have done a good job for eradicating a pest, that predatory birds and animals are, from necessity, forced to take what they can find, and thus become trespassers on man's property. The man-eating tiger and the poultry-eating skunk, weasel, and hawk are rare, though their deeds have been heralded far and wide, and their names have become notorious.

The coyote and great-horned owl in rabbit-infested regions and in vineyards, orchards, meadows, or gardens overrun by field mice, are among the best friends of man, but in thickly settled regions comparatively free from rabbits and mice both of them have to be summarily dealt with, as also does the coyote in sections where sheep raising is an important industry.

It would be easy to advise the economic value of all predacious animals were it not for the complications resulting from civilization, which introduces problems that materially affect the status of animated things. In portions of the West where fruit growing and farming are dominant industries, it may be wise to encourage the coyote and bob-

cat within certain limits, provided poultry and sheep are properly protected at night. Numerous ranchmen and fruit growers have learned by experience that these animals, if unmolested, will free their premises from rabbits and other crop and tree destroyers. Where they have been allowed to do their work thoroughly they are fully appreciated, and many ranchers would almost as soon shoot their own dogs and cats as their wild benefactors. At times the coyote feeds entirely on large insects, such as May beetles, crickets, and grasshoppers.

"Big Bill" Hollenbach a Successful Coach.

In searching for the cause of Penn State's football victories in recent years, one big factor stands out prominently, the coaching staff headed by "Big Bill" Hollenbach, former Penn captain, All-American full back, and now coaching his fourth Penn State team.

The fact that Hollenbach himself has never been much accustomed to defeat may have something to do with the success of his teams. Player and coach, Bill has figured in about seventy varsity contests, sixty-five of them having been victories.

To Make Uniform Goods at Yard.

In line with his policy of utilizing navy stations and yards in the South, where large expenditures have been made for buildings, Secretary Daniels has decided to establish, at the Charleston Navy Yard, a manufacturing plant for such parts of marine and naval-militia uniforms as can be economically made there. The secretary finds the government can make a large saving by doing the work in its own shops. The labor conditions and the proximity to Southern cotton mills indicate a more than ordinary saving in having a plant at Charleston.

She Saw Wonderful Falls of Labrador.

The first white woman who has achieved the distinction of gazing on the three roaring falls of the Grand River, in the remote wilds of Labrador, arrived in New York recently from St. John's, Newfoundland, by the Red Cross liner *Stephano*, and made light of her unusual adventure. She is Miss Laurie Coates, a blue-eyed, red-checked, and slim young Englishwoman, who has spent eighteen months as a trained nurse in hospital work in Labrador for the Grenfell Mission.

She brings back as relics of her trip from Grand Village, on Mud Lake, the interior hospital headquarters of the Grenfell Mission, to the precipitous falls, some pictures taken by a little camera and a diary of her experiences.

She had no record as an explorer, and never had handled a canoe when she suddenly decided that she was going to see the marvelous falls, the glories of which she had heard so many who had not seen them, and a few who had, describe.

Everybody at the Mud Lake Mission knew Miss Laurie, the nurse, as a very modest and soft-spoken young woman, who had cultivated only one of the virtues of explorers, and that was her ability to shoot. She also followed, even on the coldest days, the British habit of taking "a dip" in any stream that happened to be near, and not frozen so thick she could not break a hole in it.

The mission colony was a bit surprised when Miss Laurie announced that she was going to make the Grand Falls. Fred Bourdie, a native white guide, volunteered to show her the way. She had bought the old shell of the canoe

that Dillon Wallace, a mere man explorer, with lots of financial backing, had used on his expedition to find and mark the grave of Leonidas Hubbard.

Miss Coates decided that she would learn canoeing as she went along, and she did. Her shelter tent, shared by Fred, the guide, was a cotton affair—she could not afford better—that let the rain in with generous liberality; but, being an outdoor girl, a soaking did not make her ill. When she and the guide gave good-by to the mission people on July 15, many of them shook their heads. Some admonished Fred to take good care of her, which made Miss Laurie smile.

Fifteen miles from the outskirts of the Mud River settlement she had the last glimpse of a human being, except Fred, for fifty-five days. One of her first difficulties was in the management of her canoe.

While she was still an amateur and was sitting in her canoe by the side of a rapid the painter parted and she found herself whirling out in the eddies. The canoe waltzed madly out, and the guide, on the bank and powerless to help her, turned white as chalk and yelled directions at her that she was unable to understand because of the rushing waters. But she grabbed a paddle and finally mastered the little craft, getting it back to the bank. She held on by a rock until the guide came to her help.

At a point within twenty-nine miles of the starting place, Miss Laurie's canoe was tied up for use on the journey home, and she and Fred went on with one canoe. This was necessary because of the heavy portage that was coming. Miss Laurie could not "tote" her own canoe and climb heights when she already had fifty pounds on her back. The guide told her he knew of a short cut to the falls that no white explorer had ever taken. They crossed six lakes and three pondlike lakes and came out as the guide expected. They carried no compasses, trusting entirely to the guide's knowledge of the country, and shot most of their food, chiefly duck.

The roaring of the three cataracts and three tall falls, falling mostly perpendicularly, had aroused big expectations in the soul of the amateur explorer. She had expected to see all the wealth of cascaded water at one time. She was much disappointed, as she had only a glimpse of a part of it. There was no viewpoint from which the whole three falls could be taken in, so she had to snap-shot it in sections. She said she thought Niagara was much superior to the coast of Labrador.

Arriving at the falls after such fine luck, Miss Laurie became more ambitious. She wanted to show Dillon Wallace what a young woman might do if she had her heart set on it. She had placed her own name in a little bottle that had been left at the top of the falls by the Bowdoin expedition, all men. The last persons to visit the spot before her were Eugene Dalano, Fred Reed, and Clark Washburn, who put their little note in the bottle in 1908, telling of what expedition they were. Miss Laurie's note read thus:

"Laurie Coates, of herself."

Then she decided that she would outdo the men altogether by taking a little trip of about fifteen hundred miles across the plateau to Hudson Bay, over a wilderness that no white man ever had trod. She reluctantly gave it up only when her guide convinced her that it would be hazardous without another guide and more provisions. But she is going to attempt it later if she can get backing.

On the way home the canoe was smashed in rapids, and

with fifty miles or more to walk, Fred recalled that there was an old canoe hidden near the place where the other was lost, and he found it, patched it up, and they went on. It was smooth sailing after they came to Miss Laurie's canoe.

Zeppelin VI. on Flight.

The most modern of Zeppelin dirigible airships, the *Zeppelin VI*, intended for the service of the German army, ascended from Lake Constance recently and started on her first trip, during which she will try to reach Gotha, about 250 miles due north.

Work is now being pushed forward on the new naval Zeppelin, which is to replace the one destroyed in the catastrophe at Johanisthal on October 17, when the entire crew of twenty-eight officers and men were killed. The airship under construction embodies all those improvements believed by experts necessary to obviate such accidents as that which caused the recent disaster.

The Cat Often to Blame.

Many an innocent hawk, skunk, owl, and weasel has been shot for the deeds of the house cat. It is safe to say that the cat, which enjoys the comforts and protection of the home, destroys, in the aggregate, more wild birds and young poultry than all the native natural enemies combined. A cat has been known to kill a whole brood of chickens in a day. Cats, in the course of a season, have been known to practically destroy whole coveys of quail or grouse or nests full of young songsters. A well-known naturalist estimates that in the New England States alone 1,500,000 birds are destroyed annually by cats. There are over 3,500,000 birds destroyed in New York State annually, if we assume that each cat in the State kills at least one bird a week.

For its occasional misdeeds, the fox is looked upon by the majority of mankind as a villain that devotes its entire life to robbery, and derives all its forage from the chicken yard or duck pen. As a matter of fact, even in localities where foxes are abundant it is comparatively rare that poultry is destroyed by them. On a well-regulated farm, chickens are housed at night, and the fox necessarily turns its attention to field mice, rabbits, ground squirrels, and insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, and May beetles to the great benefit of the farmer. While it is true that the fox destroys a considerable number of birds, yet a ruffed grouse has been known to rear its young within 100 feet of a fox den, and none of them were molested.

While the mink feeds on fish, mussels, and birds, it is indefatigable in its search for meadow mice and other marsh-loving rodents. It is very fond of muskrats, and one of its most important services to man is its destruction of these pests about milldams, canals, and dikes, where their burrows undermine the embankment and cause disastrous overflows.

The weasel is one of nature's most efficient checks upon the hordes of meadow mice and other rodents which at times destroy forage crops, orchards, vineyards, and garden produce. It feeds also upon rabbits, squirrels, and birds, but in many sections its occasional inroads on the poultry yard have brought it into serious disrepute. While it is, of course, desirable to kill particular creatures which have acquired the poultry habit, farmers and horticulturists will make a mistake if they systematically destroy them.

The skunk renders important service by destroying im-

mense numbers of mice, white grubs, grasshoppers, crickets, cutworms, hornets, wasps, and other noxious forms. Although it prefers this kind of food, like the opossum, it will eat almost any animal matter, and at times certain wild fruits and berries. While it is said to be fond of eggs and young chickens, a mother skunk has been known to make her nest and rear her young in the inner walls of the chicken yard, and neither eggs nor fowls were molested.

Badgers are valuable in destroying ground squirrels, prairie dogs, gophers, and other burrowing animals, as well as various kinds of insects. For their valuable services, full protection should be given them, even in irrigation sections, where they sometimes dig into dikes in pursuit of the rodents, which, in the rôle of dike borers, cause so much trouble.

An important fact farmers should bear in mind is that all hawks and owls feed largely on noxious rodents and the larger insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, and May beetles. Yet in the more thickly settled sections of the country, except at rare intervals, the goshawk, duck hawk, and great horned owl are so infrequent that years will pass without an individual being seen. There are two kinds of hawks that should be kept in check, and they are the sharp-skinned and Cooper hawks. These feed almost entirely on wild birds and poultry. The heron, a flesh-eating bird, will consume a number of gophers daily. We should not, therefore, begrudge it the fish it eats when we remember that a gopher is capable of destroying trees large enough to produce marketable fruit.

The gulls and terns that live inland do effective service in checking the inroads of the injurious insects and mammals. Gulls follow the plow in the spring, and gather from the upturned soil many an insect that would later attack the growing crop. During the summer they feed on grasshoppers and crickets. Terns feed also on grasshoppers and other insects. In the South the black tern has been seen capturing the moths of the cotton-boll worm in flight over the young plants. Ravens, crows, and jays also do effective work in destroying pests, but in localities where they have increased out of proportion to the available food supply they become troublesome by killing small chickens and by destroying eggs and nestlings of wild birds.

Hunting Good for Royalty.

The Bavarian finance minister, in supporting a motion for an increase of the Bavarian king's civil list to \$1,350,000, observed, according to Doctor Mullermeiningen, who opposed the vote, that the expenses of the royal hunting lodges and game preserves were not excessive, and that it was better that royalty should shoot and hunt than run after Venus, which was a still more expensive occupation.

Doctor Mullermeiningen protested against the assumption that royalty must have expensive habits, and that it was better to choose the lesser of two evils.

"These are hard times for everybody," he declared, "and the court must be sparing, too."

Escape in Armored Train.

News of another outrage against Americans in Mexico is brought by Frank Cazin, a mining engineer, who is accompanied by his wife and daughter of sixteen. They fled from the mining camp at Aire Libre, in Puebla, along with

fifty other Americans, under fire of the Zapata revolutionists. Packed in two box cars, the walls of which were lined with sheet iron as a protection from bullets, these Americans ran a gantlet of Zapatista bullets for eight miles. Cazin tells the story as follows:

"The Zapatistas raided the camp of the Tezintlin Copper Company at Aire Libre. They broke into the office and demanded arms and ammunition. Mr. Carnahan, the manager, an American, and Mr. Stewart, a Scot, with their wives, lived upstairs. The women were unharmed, but the men met rough treatment. First, when Stewart crossed them they dragged him down the steps by his feet. One of them snapped a gun on him, but it wouldn't fire. They forced Carnahan to give up everything in the place. They knocked him about, and then one of them bit his hand—a common punishment for victims of these rebels.

"The next morning the rebels were at our cottage, not far away. They demanded arms. We gave them what we had. Then the Americans got orders to leave. The copper company had one of its trains there. Fifty of us Americans—women and children as well—got into the two box cars available, and with a few soldiers on top and a determined engineer at the throttle we set out for Tezintlin, headquarters, eight miles away. That was an awful trip, let me tell you.

"The company had anticipated just such as this, and they had lined the box cars with sheet iron. That was all that saved us. Zapatistas lined the track over the entire route, and they continually peppered bullets at us as we passed. They shot mostly at the soldiers on top of the cars, and killed some of them. If you ever heard boiler makers at work, you know what our experience inside those cars was. The bullets made a loud noise as they hit against the sheet iron, and the women and children were continually shrieking.

"We reached Tezintlin and lost no further time in taking horses and riding eight hours to Perote, where we caught a railroad and gradually worked our way to Vera Cruz. We never knew what became of the camp at Aire Libre—we left it for the rebels and the soldiers to fight over. We don't expect to go back unless things are absolutely settled."

John Ruisses is on his way to Chicago from Mexico. He thinks the United States will have a tough time in a war with Mexico. "This talk that you can fire a gun into the air and scare a Mexican is just talk—it can't be done," he said. "They fight when they want to."

Hold as Bad Man, Says He's Innocent.

The prisoner known as Ben Crede-Cravens, said to be the last of the Oklahoma bad men, still maintains that he is innocent of the crime for which he was sent to the United States penitentiary. He still maintains he is not Ben Cravens, and that his name is Charles Maust.

Since his incarceration at Leavenworth about two years ago Cravens, or Maust, as he prefers to be called, has made numerous unsuccessful attempts to gain a pardon. Warden Morgan has allowed him to write several letters recently. All of them were addressed to attorneys connected with the trial at which he was found guilty. In all of these letters Cravens asserts an injustice is being done and that a mistake in identity has been made.

That Cravens can persuade the authorities that he is innocent of the crime for which he was convicted is said to be doubtful. At the time of his trial in Guthrie, Okla.,

much evidence was introduced tending to prove the man was Cravens and the one who terrorized certain districts of Oklahoma following his escape from the Kansas penitentiary at Lansing.

Cravens' lawless deeds throughout the West caused his trial in Oklahoma to be of much prominence, and especially so on account of his sensational escape from Lansing. After escaping, Cravens went back to Oklahoma and it is charged he was involved in numerous crimes. Things got too warm for him, however, and he went to Missouri and stole a horse. He was captured and under the name of Maust was sentenced to the Missouri penitentiary. An ex-Kansas prisoner identified him there.

It is said that Cravens was convicted on the testimony of Bert Welty, also sentenced to the prison at Leavenworth, to serve a life term for the same crime Cravens was convicted of. As a matter of fact, Welty committed the crime, but Cravens was with him.

On March 31, 1901, Welty and Cravens planned to rob the general store at Red Rock, in which was the post office. Welty went to the store and lined up the loungers, who were seated about the stove. Cravens was supposed to enter by another door, but he had trouble with his horse. In the meantime the postmaster came through another door and Welty commanded him to throw up his hands. The postmaster tried to pull a gun and Welty shot him dead. Welty and Cravens, after robbing the store and post office, jumped on their horses and tried to get away. A posse was soon in pursuit. Welty was shot in the arm and fell from his horse. He was captured, found guilty, and sentenced to prison. Cravens escaped.

Cravens is now 52 years old. He goes about his labors at the prison much as do other men. The officials at the prison, although they make no statement, are said to hold the opinion that the man confined there is Cravens beyond a doubt. Cravens has not given up hope of getting a pardon.

Will Try to Swim Panama Canal.

Commodore Al Brown, of College Point, N. Y., world's champion long-distance swimmer, has gone to Panama to attempt to swim forty-eight miles through the Panama Canal. He recently swam from the Battery, New York City, to Sandy Hook, a distance of twenty-one miles.

Rap Cobb; Praise Collins.

Oscar Vitt, Tiger infielder, is getting into the literary circle. Oscar turned "author" recently, and his first contribution is on "the most valuable ball player in the world." Vitt picks Eddie Collins, and also says why he does not pick Cobb, and tells at length what he thinks of Tyrus. Oscar's story follows as it is printed under his real name:

"In selecting the best ball player I have seen, I am picking the man who does the most to win games for the club he represents. That man is unquestionably Eddie Collins, the great second baseman of the Athletics, to my way of thinking.

"Here is one player who is willing to sacrifice all personal gain to help his club. When he is on the field it is the Athletics he is trying to help, and not Eddie Collins. That is the reason why Mack's club is so successful. He has players on it who are always playing to win, and not for individual gain.

"In few departments of the game is he excelled. He is

a brilliant fielder, who thinks quickly, and he makes but few mistakes. At the bat he has few superiors. He has a wonderful eye, and when he hits the ball he meets it fairly, usually sending it away from the plate on a line for a clean drive. He can lay down a bunt with equal skill, and it is hard to figure him when he faces a pitcher.

"The point that I admire in Collins is the fact that he never plays to the grand stand. He adopts the play that will help his club and not the one that will win him applause from the spectators.

"I have seen him in games where he has laid down a sacrifice hit to score a run, whereas if he had stood up and whaled away at the ball and succeeded in knocking out a single or a double he would have been the hero of the afternoon. That is what I like about him, and I don't think there is another player in the game to-day who wins as many ball games for his club as this fellow Collins.

"Cobb is a remarkable ball player. I have been with him for two seasons, and while I consider him greater than Collins in many respects, I do not think he is as valuable to a club as Collins. He is, from a financial standpoint, as the Georgian is undoubtedly the greatest box-office attraction in the game to-day. His spectacular style of play is popular with the fans, and while the Tigers were rather lowly in the pennant race, they were good drawing cards, because the crowds would go out to see Cobb bat and steal bases.

"Cobb will try to steal a base no matter whether his club is five runs behind. This, Collins will not do. It is not the kind of ball playing that will win games. Cobb catches the eye quicker than Collins, but I think the latter gets better results for his club."

Blame Weather Men for Wrecks.

Government officials have begun an investigation to learn whether the weather bureau's forecaster at Cleveland, Ohio, issued sufficient warning of a recent storm on the Great Lakes, in which between 200 and 250 lives were lost and nineteen ships were destroyed.

A report from Forecaster Alexander, at Cleveland, has been called for. Ship captains say that inadequate forecasts from the weather bureau are largely responsible for the heavy loss of life and property on the Lakes. In the forecast for the day when the hurricane raged, the bureau predicted nothing more dangerous than high winds, snow flurries, and a drop in temperature. No hurricane warning was given. The captains assert that extra precautions should have been taken to inform all of the coming gale. They say that the bureau had every indication of a fearful storm, and yet did nothing but to issue the customary warning which is always issued in a small storm.

Pull Tooth of Tigress.

It took nine men to hold Princess while a dentist extracted an ulcerated tooth and thereby relieved an aggravated case of toothache. Princess is the big tigress at the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens, suffering for the past four days from the abscessed tooth, which made her crosser than any bear ever could be.

Princess was so cross that she refused to eat, and sulked and snarled at all who came near her cage.

To perform the operation upon the tooth, Princess had to be rendered harmless while the dentist worked with her

jaw. To do this, she was induced to enter a narrow cage which was equipped with a heavy oak partition back to which was attached four one-inch hemp ropes, one at each of the four corners. Slowly and firmly this heavy back to the narrow cage was pulled forward by the nine men until Princess found herself crowded up against the front of the cage.

She twisted, squirmed, snarled, and bit the bars, but she could not get away from her captors. Finally, becoming exhausted at her efforts to escape, she sat down to rest. Attendants with iron bars thrust into holes in the partition pinioned her in her narrow confines so that she could hardly move a muscle. A bar placed under her neck and one on top held her head so that she could not move it an inch either way. While she bit hard into a four-by-four-inch timber, the dentist, with a stout pair of pliers, extracted the troublesome tooth.

In order to remove all danger of infection, the wound was washed out with a solution of carbolic acid and peroxide. This operation must be repeated every ten days until the wound is thoroughly healed.

While Princess objected seriously to be thus handled by man, she was, nevertheless, thankful after the strenuous operation, for she purred and frisked about in her big cage like a kitten. For her supper she ate a big porterhouse steak which had been pounded tender for her special benefit, and drank a big pan of milk, which ended her self-imposed fast of more than seventy-two hours.

Paints Rings on His Hens.

In some way many of Martin Olson's fancy white leghorn chickens wandered into his neighbor's coops. Most families in the block raise white leghorns. Olson, who lives in South Chicago, painted his poultry-yard fence green last week. A snow-white rooster stuck his head in the paint bucket.

The next day Olson found the green-headed rooster in a neighbor's coop. That gave him an idea. This week, with the aid of his son, he took 100 white leghorn hens, roosters, and pullets and painted two green rings around their necks.

Hunters Get a Surprise.

Two young men, of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, John Sinclair and William Bristol, have had fame thrust upon them quite unexpectedly in a most amusing manner. They went hunting for a deer in the north woods, early in the week. They had never hunted deer before, and, like all green hunters, they imagined that all they would have to do would be to sit on a log and wait for the game to come along to be shot at. Their first day in camp was devoted mainly to searching for good places to watch for the deer. Not a shot was fired. The second day, after a good night's rest, they stealthily meandered forth, seeking a certain secluded spot where they were sure the deer would pass, en route to a drinking place. They calmly waited and silently smoked for fully an hour. The deer didn't seem to be thirsty that morning. At any rate, none showed up. Presently they heard a rustling in the bushes not far away, and in an instant they were getting ready for a shot. Imagine their surprise—if you can—when, instead of a deer, a full-grown, fierce-looking brown bear hove in sight. Without speaking a word, Bristol opened fire. His bullet probably didn't hit the mark. At least, it didn't retard the progress of the bear in the least, who

was then coming toward them rapidly. Sinclair tried to shoot, but was too excited. Discouraged, he said to Bristol, "let's run." They started for a clearing, running for their lives. It is well they took the course they did, or they might be running yet. At the edge of the clearing the bear paused, but the hunters did not. They have decided to discontinue deer hunting this season. Jim Ransom, a famous guide, who lives north of Edmonton, says it is generally believed there are more bears than deer in the woods this fall. Sinclair and Bristol say they know there are a great many more.

To Prescribe Liner Lanes.

The question whether the governments of the United States and the European countries should prescribe the lanes to be traversed by ocean liners and pass laws requiring all vessels under the respective flags to adhere strictly to those lanes is raised in the annual report of the naval hydrographic office, made public recently.

The lanes now in use were adopted by the steamship companies April 15, 1913, and will continue in force until changed by them, unless an international agreement should be reached. The naval hydrographer, Captain F. Cooper, is at present in London, attending the International Conference on Safety at Sea, and it is expected that he will submit the proposed change to that body.

To Extend Student Camps.

Major General Leonard Wood, chief of staff of the United States army, has issued a bulletin giving the program for the organization next summer of student camps like those held last summer at Gettysburg, Pa., and at Monterey, Cal., under the supervision of officers appointed by the war department. In formulating plans for this undertaking, General Wood will have the assistance of this advisory committee of university and college presidents: President John G. Hibbin, Princeton University, chairman; President Abbott Lawrence Lowell, Harvard University; President Arthur T. Hadley, Yale University; President George H. Denny, University of Alabama; President Henry B. Hutchins, University of Michigan; Brigadier General Edward W. Nichols, superintendent Virginia Military Institute; John H. Finley, president of the College of the City of New York; President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, University of California; President Henry Sturgis Drinker, Lehigh University, secretary.

The war department is considering sites for the camps next summer with an eye to the healthfulness of the surroundings and facilities for social intercourse, bathing, swimming, and other recreations. One site has been determined on at Burlington, Vt. In his bulletin, General Wood calls attention to the value of these student camps in increasing the business efficiency of the students who participate through habits of discipline, obedience, self-control, order, command, and the study of organization and administration as applied to first-class modern armies.

The camps, he says, are an invaluable national asset in providing means of increasing the present inadequate personnel of the trained military reserves of the country from a class of educated men from which, in case of national emergency, a large part of the volunteer officers must be drawn.

Only university or college students and students in the graduating class at high schools or preparatory schools, or recent university graduates, or men who have received a

satisfactory certificate of attendance at a previous student camp from the war department are eligible for enrollment at the camps. They must be citizens of the United States or must have announced their intention to become citizens.

The camps will continue five weeks, from early in July to the middle of August, at a cost of \$17.50 a man for board and from \$5 to \$10 for uniform and clothing. The government will furnish tents, cots, blankets, infantry equipment, and hospital and medical care. Troops of the regular army will be in attendance to cooperate in instructing the students, and selected officers will lecture on tactics, with field demonstrations. The students will pay their own transportation to and from camp.

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